ALL-STORY

Jan. 11

Combined with MUNSEY

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Spotlight
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Hundreds of N. R. I. trained men are today making big money—holding down big jobs—in the Radio field. You, too, should get into Radio. You can stay home, hold your job, and learn in your spare time. Lack of high school education or Radio experience are no drawbacks.

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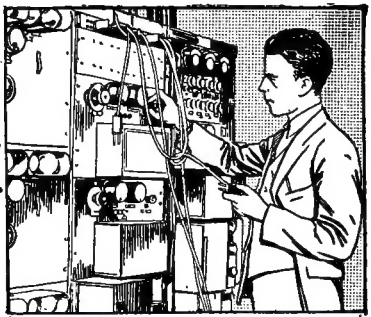

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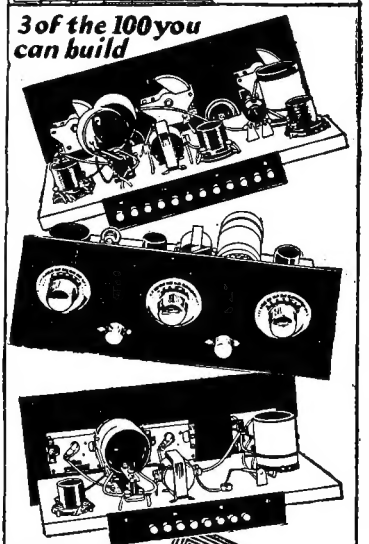

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Dear Mr. Smith: Send me your Free book "Rich Rewards in Radio," giving information on the big-money opportunities in Radio and your practical method of teaching with six Radio Outfits. I understand this places me under no obligation.

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ALL-STORY

Combined with MUNSEY

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Sometime and Someplace

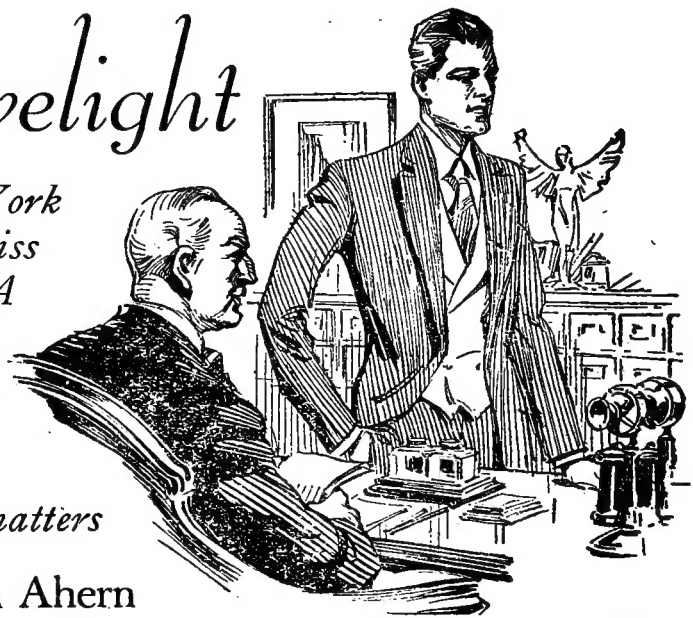
SOMETIME I'll whisper
When dreams come true,
All my life long
I've been waiting for you!
Waiting and hoping and counting the days,
Giving you fealty, giving you praise.
Though I know neither
Your home nor your race,
But just that I'll meet you
Sometime and someplace.

Sometimes I'll wonder,
When dreams come true,
How I existed
So long without you.
Shaping my life for its ultimate goal,
Holding you ever enshrined in my soul,
Dreaming a dream
Of your charm and your grace,
Waiting to meet you
Sometime and someplace!

L. Mitchell Thornton

Spotlight and Lovelight

Miss New York —maybe Miss America! A proud little beauty queen wins — and loses the one thing that matters



By Helen Ahern

IT was the end of a suffocating June day in the offices of the Peerless Radio Company. The clang of the closing bell was a welcome sound.

Lois Gillepsie in one swift movement closed her stenographic notebook, slammed shut her desk, and snatched up her purse.

"Gosh! What a day!" Mollie Kramer, who worked across the aisle from Lois, sighed heavily as the two girls joined the throng that was hurrying for the locker room.

"I'm simply wilted and my nose—look at it!" Lois took a peep in her pocket mirror.

"You should worry about a shiny nose. At least, your hair doesn't come out of curl and hang in strings the way mine does." Mollie made a sound between a groan and a laugh and indicated her dejected mouse-colored hair.

"Ummh, curly hair's a blessing," said Lois, "or supposed to be, but I can't see what difference it makes in the long run."

Mollie gasped at this heresy.

"Gee, some people don't know how lucky they are. Believe me, if I had hair and eyes and skin like yours I'd spend my days singing hosannas."

"What good does it do me?" Lois asked impatiently. She could not help but know that her hair was the color of fresh buttercups and her eyes brown velvet, that her skin was the gardenia

white which belongs to the dark-eyed blonde.

Yet, as she had told Mollie, none of these things seemed to make much difference. She was simply another stenographer in the big radio wholesale house.

"You are the winner of the beauty contest conducted by my paper," he told her

"At least, you have a man." Mollie glanced significantly at the modest diamond that adorned Lois's left third finger.

LOIS shrugged. In her present mood, she could not even feel grateful for James, although she was going to marry him next January.

That was just it. If they had been married last spring in the first flush of their romance she might have been ecstatically happy, but James had wanted to wait until he received his raise the first of the year.

Of course, that was the sensible thing to do, but Lois couldn't help wishing that James were less sensible, a little more eager. She was only nineteen. She would have liked a dashing, impetuous fiancé to whom each minute of waiting was an hour—a Young Lochinvar.

She smiled at her own romantic thought. It was impossible to picture James in the rôle of a Young Lochinvar. Dear, steady, cautious James.

"That's the thing I like about you, Lois," he had said the night they became engaged. "A pretty girl and yet you're not giddy. You have brains. I know you'll make a good wife."

Lois wrinkled her small nose at the remembrance. "A good wife!" It would have been so much more thrilling if James had talked about the color of her eyes or the way her hair curled up in little yellow tendrils at the nape of her neck. Of course, she wanted to be a good wife and she would, but—

Such speculation was nonsense, Lois told herself sternly. She ought to be ashamed. James was a darling and he'd make an ideal husband. At least,

her mother, her father, and her sister Alice all said so. He was dependable and he was a go-getter. Wasn't he the youngest department head at Peerless, and slated for the general manager's desk within a few more years?

"This is worse than Saturday night in a movie lobby," said Mollie, as the two girls were caught in the swirling crowd of workers in the locker room.

Lois nodded a trifle absently and hurried to her own locker. She pulled a soft blue felt hat over her fair hair and dabbed at her nose with a powder puff. She was anxious to get out of the stuffy dressing-room, although the subway would be even worse.

"Hey, Lois! Come here!" Mollie called to her from a group of chattering girls. She waved an evening tabloid.

"What is it?" Lois was a little annoyed at the delay.

"Come here," peremptorily.

As Lois obeyed, Mollie pointed to a headline:

BEAUTY CONTEST OPENS TO NEW YORK WORKING GIRLS

"And listen," Mollie read from the paper excitedly:

> "Every factory, office and store in Greater New York is invited to enter a candidate in the big beauty contest which is being conducted by the *Daily Review*. Any girl who is employed in this city is eligible. The winner will be sent to Atlantic City to participate in the national contest as 'Miss New York.' She will be given two weeks' vacation, with all expenses paid, and will be supplied with a suitable wardrobe. Candidates will be judged from photographs, which must be sent in before June 15, accompanied by one hundred votes."

"Sounds grand," said Lois, "but a strap on the I. R. T. is waiting for me." She started to leave.

"Hold on!" Mollie caught her arm. "Don't you get the idea? We've just decided that we're going to enter you as the candidate from Peerless, haven't we, girls?"

"Sure, Lois has all the looks around this joint." A red-headed, freckled girl from the files agreed enthusiastically. The rest nodded. Lois was well liked by her fellow workers, as she was quiet and unassuming and had never used her good looks to snatch other girls' men.

She was somewhat embarrassed and more than a little touched by the girls' friendly enthusiasm.

"It's mighty sweet of you to want to enter me," she said, "but isn't it kind of useless? Just think of the hundreds of girls who'll be sending in their pictures."

"If there's a better picture sent in than that photograph you gave me last Christmas, I'll eat it." Mollie was a stanch and loyal admirer. "I'll take it to this newspaper myself to-morrow after I've got the votes."

"Well, if you want to." Lois yielded carelessly to her friend's determination. "But don't expect too much."

SHE made her escape smiling at the idea of herself as a beauty queen.

Of course, she was pretty—her mirror told her that—but beauty queens were divinely lovely; dream creatures who ended by marrying millionaires or by signing a fat movie contract.

Certainly she didn't feel much like a beauty queen as she wedged herself into a Bronx-bound subway train. A man's elbow knocked her hat over one eye. A fat woman was prodding her in the ribs with a remarkably sharp-cornered box. Some one had been eating onions.

Lois groaned to herself and forgot

all about beauty contests in sheer discomfort.

Just when it seemed that she must faint from the heat and the jam, she saw 168th Street flash past and knew that the next stop was hers.

The home of the Gillepsie family was a four-room walk-up flat in one of the new red brick apartment buildings that dot the Bronx. Only the thought of the cool bath that was awaiting her enabled Lois to climb those four weary flights.

"Are you dead, child?" Mrs. Gillepsie, a rotund, pleasant-faced woman, met her at the door.

"Worse than that." Lois dropped her hat, gloves and purse on a chair and hurried to the room that she shared with her sister Alice.

"I've got a cold supper waiting." Her mother followed her. "I kind of thought potato salad and cold meat would be a right sensible meal on a night like this."

"It sounds heavenly, but I've got to rest and get clean before I can eat."

"That's all right. Alice isn't home yet. I do hope she isn't still at the store on a night like this. She's always such a hand to hang around and work overtime. I never saw such an ambitious girl."

Mrs. Gillepsie's tone was half complaining, half admiring.

"Alice is the model of what a young business woman ought to be," Lois laughed, as she slipped out of her little one-piece street dress and stretched her slim young body luxuriously.

"Your sister's a mighty sensible girl." Mrs. Gillepsie suspected criticism in Lois's words.

"Of course," Lois agreed with her mother quickly.

Alice was sensible. James was sensible. Her mother was sensible—everybody was sensible. Too darned sensible! Lois was still in a rebellious mood. Wasn't there anything in life but being sensible? Going to work every morning, saving your money for linens and silver for a hope chest, waiting patiently for your sensible fiancé to get his raise, and then be married quietly and sensibly to settle down as a good, sensible wife?

Sensible, sensible, sensible! She hated the word.

WHAT did she want? Lois tried to analyze her own desires. She felt vaguely that life should offer something radiant and shining, something ecstatic, something— Oh, it was too hot to want anything very much!

She relaxed blissfully into a cool tub and was comforted. As she dusted her cool body with powder and slipped into a sheer dress, she became her normal, sunny self.

After all, there might be something to this "sensible" stuff. Mrs. Gillepsie's sensible cold meal was delicious, and Alice, who appeared late for dinner, but amazingly cool and crisp, bore news of a ten dollar a week raise she had just received.

Another reward for being sensible!

Alice was three years older than Lois and the kind of girl who is called "nice-looking." Her hair was blond, but smooth and ashen, where Lois's was a yellow flame. She was, as Lois had said, a model young business woman, almost aggravatingly efficient and trim.

She made no attempt at prettiness. Her clothes were smartly tailored but inconspicuous, and her eyes, which were her best feature, looked out brownly from behind tortoise-shelled glasses. The glasses were totally un-

needed, but "they gave one an air." Those were Alice's words.

"Another raise?" Lois looked at her clever sister in awed respect. Alice always made her feel stupid and unimportant.

"Yes, I just heard about it tonight." Alice settled herself at the family table. "I was staying to put stock away when our buyer came along. She said she appreciated my interest in the work and was going to give me the job of head of stock in the negligees. It's just a question of time," complacently, "before I'll get the assistant buyership."

"That's grand." Lois congratulated her sister whole-heartedly. "But what's going to become of that little Silesky girl who had the job?" She had a pitying vision of underfed, overdressed little Rosa Silesky, whom she had met once when having lunch with Alice at the store.

"They're letting her out. She's a terrible little scatterbrain." Alice's manner was indifferent. She had none of Lois's quick sympathy for the underdog. "She, in fact none of the girls in our department, has done a particle of work since four o'clock this afternoon. Somebody left a copy of a tabloid lying around and all they could do was talk about some beauty contest."

"Oh!" Lois suddenly remembered her own unsought entry in the contest. "The girls down at the office are sending in my picture for that thing."

"WHAT! How perfectly ridiculous." Alice, after a momentary pause, turned a disgusted glance upon her sister.

"I don't see why. Lois is as pretty as they come," Mrs. Gillepsie spoke up. Her attitude surprised Lois.

"That's not the point," Alice said sternly. "It's just that it cheapens a girl to go into beauty contests. And what would James say?"

"I hadn't thought of that." Mrs. Gillepsie looked squelched.

"Why should he say anything?" Lois was a little nettled by her sister's manner. "He doesn't own me—not yet. And there's no harm in sending in a picture. There's little chance that anything will ever come of it."

"Maybe not, but it would be just your hard luck to win or something."

"Hard luck!" Lois cried. "I think it would be too marvelous for words to win and get two weeks' vacation with all expenses paid at Atlantic City."

"You're talking nonsense," Alice said unpleasantly. "No sensible girl would risk offending a wonderful man like James for a hundred beauty contests."

"But I'm not a sensible girl. I don't want to be sensible." Lois's voice rose with a note of hysteria.

"I don't believe you appreciate James." A glint of anger gleamed behind Alice's glasses. "You little idiot!" she added scathingly.

"Now, now, don't get upset, girls, not on such a hot night." Mrs. Gillepsie averted an imminent quarrel between the two sisters. "You're both tired out—"

"Yes, yes, have some more ice tea and keep cool." Mr. Gillepsie, a mild-mannered Wall Street clerk, joined his wife in restoring the family peace.

Lois smiled at her father and mother, and repressed the angry retort that had risen to her lips.

"I suppose James is coming over to-night." Mrs. Gillepsie tried to lead the conversation into safe channels.

"Naturally," said Lois in a slightly

edged tone. It was Wednesday night and James had not missed a Wednesday or Saturday night in six months.

"He's such a reliable young man—so sensible." Her mother beamed.

"If you mention that word again, I'll scream." Lois jumped up. Her nerves were at the breaking point.

"It's just the extreme heat." Her father's gentle voice followed her as she flung out of the room.

Father was always making excuses. A little shamefaced, Lois returned to the table and dropped a penitent kiss on top of his thinning hair. Her unreasonable display of temper was a mystery even to herself.

VERY meekly she helped her mother with the dishes and manicured her nails in preparation for James's coming. No further mention was made of the beauty contest. Alice, who was absorbed in orders which she had brought from the store, had apparently forgotten the argument.

Promptly at eight thirty the doorbell rang. Lois almost groaned. In all the six months of their engagement James had appeared at this same hour to the minute—never five minutes early, never five minutes late. That was James!

She chided herself for fault-finding when he came in carrying gingerly a quart container of ice cream.

"Thought you and your folks might enjoy it on a night like this," he said.

"You're a perfect angel." Lois's recent unkind thoughts made her praise all the more fulsome. James was a dear. He was good not only to her, but to her mother and father and Alice. The way a man treats the old folks, that's the test of a good husband, so Mrs. Gillepsie always said. Lois's mother approved highly of James.

She herself liked James a lot, but she did wish his nose would not twitch like a rabbit's when he talked. He was a slight, very erect young man with an earnest face, well-oiled dark hair and rather nice, though near-sighted, blue eyes. In spite of his small build he had an impressive manner which had caught Lois's imagination early in their acquaintance.

"It's so warm," he said when they had finished the ice cream, "that I thought it might be a good idea to take a ferry and go over to Palisades Park. Perhaps you'd go with us?" He turned to Alice.

"No, thanks. I wouldn't think of spoiling your evening. Threesomes are always a bore." She refused firmly enough, but Lois caught a wistful note in her voice.

"Do come. We'd love to have you," she said. Her invitation was sincere. Lois liked to have her sister along on their parties. Alice was a much better listener than herself when James talked business—and he usually did. It bored Lois.

"Well, I might. Just wait till I change my blouse."

Alice came out a few minutes later looking uncommonly well in fresh make-up and the one frilly blouse that she owned.

AS Lois had anticipated, James talked animatedly of sales resistance and radio distribution from the moment they boarded a Riverside bus until they left the Palisades ferry. Alice listened and made intelligent comments that encouraged him to continue.

Lois thrilled to the carnival atmosphere of the park, and tried to arouse James and Alice to a playtime mood.

"Let's ride the roller coaster," she

cried as the Cyclone loomed up before them.

James shuddered visibly at the sight of its dizzying dips and curves.

"Don't be silly and kiddish, Lois." Alice's tone was caustic.

"But, of course, you really don't want to go on that awful contraption." James dismissed the suggestion quickly.

Lois did not press the issue. Perhaps she *was* childish and undignified, but it would be fun to play just like these other people about them. She didn't want to be old and dignified. She was nineteen, but that wasn't terribly grown-up.

She remembered once when, at the age of ten, she had been kept inside the house because of measles and had watched a group of neighbor children playing in the street. She had been heartbroken and forlorn. She felt just like that now.

Loneliness ached dully within her as she stood between Alice and James on the return ferry trip. She looked at the diamond-studded skyline of Manhattan and thrilled to the dreamy beauty of the great city.

She wished James would put his arm around her and hug her close the way that boy ahead of them was holding his girl. The unknown boy was crooning now to his girl, softly:

"Let me see the lovelight
In those eyes of blue.
Let me call you sweetheart;
I'm in love with you."

The lovely old song sent a stab of mingled pain and delight through Lois. She shivered slightly.

"You really should take a coat along with you. It's always cold on the water." James noticed the shiver and spoke in a rather annoyed tone.

That night Lois slept fitfully in her warm bedroom and dreamed of cool breezes, swishing waters, and an unseen lover, who sang to her tenderly.

SHE awoke to another stifling day. New York was in the grip of a heat wave that lasted for three weeks. The city was like a furnace with its sun-scorched pavements.

Lois thought longingly sometimes of the lucky girl who would win the beauty contest and the free trip to Atlantic City. The wind would be blowing there, cool and fresh from the ocean. She began watching the *Review* for news of the contest.

There were over a thousand entries. Any hope she might have had of her own chances of winning evaporated. A thousand pretty girls—a thousand lovely pictures. She might as well forget about Atlantic City vacations.

The girls at the office, especially Mollie, awaited the end of the contest eagerly and talked much. Some of their chatter must have reached James, because he questioned Lois on the subject.

"What's this nonsense," he asked, "about you setting out to be a beauty queen? Some of the fellows down at Peerless have been kidding me." He sounded aggrieved.

"Why is it nonsense?" His didactic manner aroused a streak of perversity in Lois. "It wouldn't be so bad to get away from the office during this hot weather. The winner gets two weeks' vacation at Atlantic City with all expenses paid."

"But I thought you liked your work."

"Like it! Who wants to be cooped up in a stuffy office on days like these?"

"You do look tired." James's manner became solicitous. "Maybe we

ought to get married right away. Of course, it's the sensible thing to wait until I get my raise, but if you're tired of working—"

"Oh, I'm all right." Lois was frightened at the suggestion of immediate marriage with James. Once she might have been happy over the prospect, but now she felt oddly reluctant. "Next winter will be plenty of time," she said.

"I'm glad you feel that way. It's a mistake for people to rush into marriage without proper financial background. Anyhow, just try to get really interested in your work and you'll forget about the heat. Isn't that right, Alice?" he asked the other girl for confirmation.

Lois wondered the next morning when she rushed out at eight fifteen and fought her way through the perspiring subway crowd, why she had not jumped at the chance to marry James and escape from this deadly routine. He had made his offer in good faith. She would have to marry him in January. Why not now?

The day was even warmer than those that had gone before. It was also a Jonah day for Lois. She began by spilling ink on her best dress.

As winner of the contest, Lois was photographed a dozen times

Her salad at lunch was warm and wilted. She made three mistakes in an important letter, which had been dictated by the general manager. He gave it back to her with a reprimand and requested her to recopy it just ten minutes before closing time.

Lois winked back tears and settled herself before the typewriter miserably.

"SAY, Miss Gillepsie," an office boy from the president's office sidled up grinning, "the boss wants to see you."

Lois gasped. The general manager must have reported her errors. She was going to be fired. Why was she

so stupid and inefficient? What would James say—and Alice, who was so clever at her own job?

"Oh, dear!" She gave a despairing sigh. "I'll come at once." Her knees quaked so that she could hardly follow the boy to the president's office.

She entered the sanctum timidly and noted with some surprise that the president was not alone. A tall young man stepped forward to meet her with an eager "Miss Gillepsie?"

She nodded. The president motioned her to a seat affably.

Lois was a trifle reassured by this courtesy and ventured a second look at the young man. She noticed that he was remarkably good-looking in an athletic, clean-cut fashion. His eyes were amazing, slate-colored and long-lashed. She liked the way his brown hair grew back from his forehead in rumpled waves.

"Miss Gillepsie, this is Mr. Wilson of the *Daily Review*." The president's voice was unctuous. "I believe he has some news for you," he said.

"Yes, maybe you can guess." Mr. Wilson grinned down at her. His voice was pleasant and faintly drawling.

The *Daily Review!* That was the tabloid—and to-day— Why, it was the final day of the contest!

Lois's brown velvet eyes widened.

"But—is it—"

"Yes, you're the winner of the beauty contest our paper has been conducting. The edition carrying the news is on the street now. You will, of course, have to plan to go to Atlantic City by the end of the week."

Lois swallowed hard. She was too astonished to speak.

"I've just been telling Mr. Wilson that Peerless is going to give you a vacation with pay during the next two weeks," said the president. "We're very proud to have one of our girls so signally honored. Let me congratulate you."

It was true then! The president of Peerless was not a man to jump at conclusions.

"That—that is awfully nice of you," Lois stammered with excitement.

"Not at all. Glad to do it." He extended his hand. "Let me wish you lots of luck in the national contest. We'll all be rooting for you here at Peerless. And if the movies don't get you, young lady, there's a little raise and a position as receptionist waiting for you when you get back. We can use a decorative girl like you in our front office."

"And now I must see you a moment." Mr. Wilson led her into the outer anteroom. "I want an interview."

"But—I—I don't know what to say," Lois faltered.

"You don't have to say anything," the reporter told her gayly. "I'll say everything for you. You see, I'm your ghost writer."

"What?" It was a new expression to Lois.

"It's this way. The *Review* will want a story of your life and a day-by-day account of your experiences at Atlantic City. I've been assigned to go along with you and write everything up for you." He grinned again and added naïvely: "I think I'm going to like this assignment a lot."

His meaning was plain. He might just as well have said: "I think I'm going to like you a lot."

Lois was furious with herself for blushing. "I'm sure the sea air will be lovely at Atlantic City," she said primly.

"I'm crushed." He assumed an air

of humility. Then he threw back his head and laughed. He was even better-looking when he laughed. His slate-colored eyes crinkled up into funny little wrinkles and his teeth flashed whitely against the tan of his lean young face.

LOIS found herself laughing with him. She was suddenly very happy.

"But getting down to business," he said, "I'm going to call on you to-night at your home, if I may. I'll bring a photographer along so we'll have some more pictures of you to run with the story. Then to-morrow we'll go shopping."

Lois looked blank and he explained:

"Several of the specialty shops are giving dresses and hats and things like that to the winner. You'll have a complete new set of glad rags by the time you're through."

She clapped her hands delightedly. "Oh, it sounds like a fairy tale."

"Have to use that line in my story. Cinderella stuff, eh, what?" He drew out a folded pad of paper and scrawled down a note.

"Are you going to write up everything I say?" Lois was dismayed.

"Well, that depends on what you say." His smile was teasing.

"And you're going with me—every place?"

"Bet your life. Wherever you are, Jerry Wilson will be Jerry-on-the-spot. I'm your ghost writer. It gives me privileges."

"Not so many." Lois answered chaff with chaff. Jerry Wilson had a gayety about him that made her feel like being very frivolous.

"Maybe not. Anyhow, I can look at you a lot and that's something. I'll be calling about seven to-night."

"All right," said Lois. "And now I must tell the girls in the office. It was their idea in the first place."

She stepped out of the office, to be engulfed in a swarm of excited girls. The evening edition of the *Review* with the news of her victory had arrived. Every one talked at once.

"Aren't you just thrilled to death?"

"And they're going to give you marvelous clothes—"

"Maybe you'll get in the movies—"

"Or marry some rich guy." This was Mollie's suggestion.

"How could I?" Lois laughed. "I'm already engaged!"

To James! She stopped aghast. This was the first time she had thought of him since her summons to the president's office. What would he think of a fiancée who had won a beauty contest? He'd be furious. And Alice?

Lois became worried. The road of a beauty queen was not to be entirely paved with roses. She looked around the office anxiously. James was nowhere in sight. She hoped he had gone home before the news broke.

As soon as she could escape from her exclaiming admirers and well-wishers, Lois made her way to the Bronx subway. She wanted to get home in time to finish dinner and change her clothes before Jerry Wilson came. She must look lovely for him—and the photographer, who was going to take her picture. Of course, she wasn't interested in Jerry Wilson personally, even though he was the best-looking man she had ever seen.

Why, it was her station already! She had almost ridden past. In a flurry she left the train and hurried out into the hot street that led to her home.

Both Alice and her father had preceded her. The family was gathered

in solemn conclave in the living room over a copy of the *Review*.

ALICE looked up at Lois's entrance. "What's the meaning of this?" she asked, pointing to the picture. Her voice shook with indignation.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Lois laughed with mischievous intent.

"Wonderful!" Alice had a tragic air. "I think it's terrible. Poor, poor James!"

"Why should he mind having Lois called the best-looking girl in New York?" Mr. Gillepsie surveyed his youngest daughter fondly. "I sure don't mind being her dad."

"But the publicity—the disgrace. And James is so reserved."

"It isn't as if I'd robbed a bank or run off with somebody's husband," Lois said in self-defense.

"That's right. I can't see that she's done anything so awful." Mrs. Gillepsie joined the discussion. She was plainly divided between maternal pride over her daughter's fame and apprehension as to the possibility of antagonizing James.

"You just wait. You'll see!" With this warning Alice flounced from the room.

Lois looked after her sister thoughtfully. It was always a mystery to her how Alice could manage to work herself into such tantrums over anything that concerned James.

They did not have long to wait for James's opinion. The family had just seated themselves at dinner when the doorbell rang.

"Maybe it's the reporter, Jerry Wilson. He was coming to-night." Lois sprang up eagerly.

"A reporter! Coming here?" Alice gave a despairing groan.

Lois paid no attention. She was already at the door and was hanging over the stairs to catch a glimpse of the visitor. She was both amazed and disappointed to see the top of James's well-oiled dark head appear beneath her, instead of Jerry Wilson's rumpled brown thatch. James early!

He had never, in all the months she had known him, appeared at this hour, and without a telephone call to announce his coming. She slipped back into the living room to await his arrival in a dignified fashion.

He came in puffing from his four-flight climb. His first words were identical with Alice's. "What's the meaning of this?" He also waved a *Review* in her face.

"Why, I seem to have won the beauty contest," Lois said mildly.

"It's impossible. You'll be disgraced. You'll lose your job."

"Oh, no," Lois contradicted him with satisfaction. "The president of Peerless himself congratulated me, and has given me a vacation with pay while I'm gone and a raise when I get back."

"That old dodo! All he's looking for is some free advertising for the company!"

James must be terribly disturbed, Lois thought, to speak disrespectfully of a superior. He was most complimentary, as a rule, when referring to officers of the Peerless Company.

"But what harm is there in all this?" she asked.

"I never thought it of you." He shook his head sadly. "You never acted flighty before."

"Now, children, let's not quarrel." Mrs. Gillepsie came in, anxious and placating. "Do sit down with us, James, and eat a bite of dinner."

"I might at that," he said. "I was so upset I hadn't even thought of din-

ner." He gave Lois a reproachful look.

He appeared calmed after he had eaten a generous helping of cold roast ham, some of Mrs. Gillepsie's truly delicious scalloped potatoes, a combination salad and some frozen pudding; but he continued to steal sidewise glances at Lois as if she were some strange specimen. He shook his head from time to time.

"You'll have to get out of this some way," he said over his second glass of iced coffee.

"I've already agreed to go through with it!"

"You have? When?"

"This afternoon. I talked to a reporter from the *Review*, and he's coming out here to-night."

"That's just what I was afraid of." James threw up his hands in alarm. "You'll be meeting the wrong class of people if you go into this thing—newspaper men, movie men, silly girls! What's this reporter like?"

"He seemed very nice."

"Nice!" James snorted. "What do you know about men of his sort—bums, fly-by-nights."

"I'm sure he isn't a bum. Besides," —Lois was really irritated now—"I can take care of myself. I've worked for almost two years. If you wanted me to be a sheltered violet why didn't you marry me last spring?"

"That's unfair, Lois." Alice flew to James's rescue. "You know James is just being sensible and waiting until he's in a position to take care of you."

"Yes, of course." James threw her a grateful look. "Alice understands," he said to Lois. "If you had half her sense you'd never have gone into a thing like this."

"Well, I'm in it!" Lois's tone was challenging.

"So you are." James pushed back his chair from the table and arose. For several minutes he paced the room in silence. When he spoke again his voice was resigned. "All I can say is this—I hope you'll keep your head and not turn out to be one of those giddy flappers who think of nothing but their faces."

Lois was conscious of something like regret deep within her. For one wild moment she had hoped—yes, *hoped*, not feared—that James was going to give her the air!

A SECOND ring of the doorbell prevented further argument. This time it was really Jerry Wilson, followed by a very small but officious photographer. Lois presented him to her mother and father and Alice.

"And this is Mr. Harden, my—my—" She hesitated a little when she introduced James.

"Fiancé!" James frowned and supplied the missing word.

"Oh—I didn't know." Jerry Wilson looked at her, almost accusingly. His slate-colored eyes mirrored surprise and—

Lois didn't dare admit to herself that she saw disappointment in their depths.

His manner at once became very businesslike. "If you don't mind," he said, "we'll get at the pictures. We'll want several poses of you, Miss Gillepsie, both alone and with your family."

"Count me out. I don't care for cheap publicity," said Alice, who had been eying the proceedings disdainfully.

Jerry raised his eyebrows. It was a habit of his. They made little peaks on his forehead. "Just as you please,"

he said politely. "But you won't disappoint me, will you, Mrs. Gillepsie?" He grinned at Lois's mother in his most engaging way.

"Why, no; not if you put it that way." She was fluttered by his charm.

Lois was photographed on the davenport, on a table, with a book, with a mixing bowl, with her mother, with her father, with both parents, in profile and in full length. The photographer was tireless in catching every angle of her lovely face and body.

James watched. His disgust was obvious. After a time, in his most icy tones, he suggested that he and Alice might go to a neighborhood moving picture house.

"I'm sure she's as bored as I am by this silly performance."

"Well, go ahead." Lois sped him on his way with relief.

"I gather your boy friend isn't exactly breaking down about this contest business." Jerry turned to Lois inquiringly.

"James is very reserved." She was unconsciously quoting Alice.

"James—don't you ever call him 'Jimmie'?"

Lois laughed at the absurdity. She would as soon walk up and address President Hoover as "Herbie," as call James Harden, "Jimmie."

The pictures were finally finished to the photographer's satisfaction, and he departed with his camera.

"And now for the story of your life," said Jerry. "Just tell your boy Jerry all your hopes and fears and ambitions."

IT was hard to get started, but he prompted her with sympathetic questions, and Lois was soon telling him all about her childhood in a little town up-State, the thrill of moving to New York, her first job. She told him other things, too—silly, unimportant things, like the way she had cried the first time she heard the "Rhapsody in Blue," a party dress that she adored, her beloved Airedale puppy that had been run over by a truck. She even told him how it had brought a lump to her throat to hear a boy singing, "Let Me Call You Sweetheart," to his girl.

"Perhaps I can sing it to you when we're down at Atlantic City," said Jerry. There was a warm light in his eyes.

"Oh, but—" A little pulse pounded in Lois's throat.

"I know," he said quickly; "you're engaged and all that, but you could pretend I was James, and then it would be all right, wouldn't it?"

Lois flushed in swift embarrassment. "But I couldn't pretend you were James. You—you're different."

"I suppose I am. I guess it wouldn't be such a good idea anyhow. I might forget it was just pretend."

Their eyes met for a breath-taking second. Lois's heart was beating madly. She raised her hand in a little, frightened, protesting gesture.

"Well, I'll have to be getting back to the office to make our deadline." Jerry's practical tone broke the dangerous tension. "I've got just one hour to write up the story."

"But you won't write up everything I said." Lois remembered her revelations in a panic. Never had she talked so freely to a man before in her life. What had possessed her? Had those ardent eyes of his bewitched her?

"No, certainly not." Jerry was reassuring. "I'll just put down the facts. The rest will be—between you and me." His soft, drawling voice gave an intimacy to the last phrase.

Lois's cheeks were burning as she closed the door behind him. She was alarmed by her own emotions. Was she falling in love with a newspaper reporter whom she had met only a few hours before? She had never felt this way about James. But she was going to marry James. She mustn't lose her head over the first handsome man she met. Jerry was just a gallant, intriguing figure, who would flit across her horizon and be gone in two weeks. She was merely another "assignment" to him.

She managed to calm her inner tumult a little, but she could not repress the fierce exultation that flamed up when she remembered that to-morrow, the next day, every day for two glorious weeks, she was going to see Jerry Wilson.

THE next morning early he called to take her on the promised shopping tour. It seemed all a part of a happy dream to set out in a taxicab, with Jerry, incredibly handsome, at her side.

They made their first stop before an inexpensive florist's shop. Jerry left her in the cab and disappeared for five minutes. He came back bearing two perfect gardenias.

"I wanted to make the first gift to the new beauty queen, 'Miss New York.'" He burlesqued an elaborate bow. "It's not much, but yours truly is one of the poorest of the Gentlemen of the Press."

"They're too lovely, and you—you're sweet!" Lois caught the gardenias to her impulsively. Her brown velvet eyes were shining as she pinned the waxy white flowers to her shoulder.

Jerry watched her in silence. "You're so beautiful," he said huskily.

"Hey, where to now?" The taxi-driver's question recalled them to their errands.

Jerry named a smart dress shop on Fifty-Seventh Street.

"They'll outfit you with sport clothes," he said. "We'll go on to Mme. Marie's for your evening duds."

"I'm afraid I'm going to wake up." Lois's voice was an awed whisper.

More and more as the day passed it seemed as if she must be living in a dream. In shop after shop, whose clothes were famous for their costly chic, she was received like visiting royalty. Proprietors pressed upon her gowns that cost more than she used to earn in a month. She made her selections excitedly. It was the first time in her life that she had been able to choose a dress without looking first at the price tag.

Jerry was called into consultation. He approved highly of a pale yellow sport suit that just matched her hair, an evening dress of black net, demurely long as to skirt, and daringly low as to bodice, a picture dress and hat of flowered cream chiffon, and a very naughty but delightful white bathing suit which she was to wear for the final judging at Atlantic City.

Lucky Lois!

"What's the material—what do you call that color—what the deuce is the name of that jigger down the side?" He asked innumerable questions about each garment, so he could write the costumes up in detail for the thousands of *Review* readers who were following avidly each move of the newly chosen "Miss New York."

In the midst of the shopping they had to stop for a luncheon which was being given in her honor by the newspaper. Famous names were rattled off to her casually. Jerry pointed out some

of the guests whom she recognized as well-known editors, motion picture executives, actors, and theater directors. She was stared at, exclaimed over, and congratulated until her head whirled.

"This is just a sample of what it will be like at Atlantic City," Jerry said when they were at last on the way home.

She leaned back in the cab. She was very tired. Jerry's shoulder looked very safe and inviting. It would be nice to put her head there. What on earth made her think of such a thing? Lois was shocked at her unruly

A bald movie magnate invited her to ride with him

"I'm a little scared." Lois made the confession in a small girl voice. "Those men—some of them patted my shoulder and wanted my telephone number."

"If any of those heavy sugar daddies try to get too gay"—Jerry squared his shoulders aggressively—"you just refer 'em to me."

His eyes glowered.

"I'm glad you're going to Atlantic City with me," Lois said simply. And she meant it. Jerry's smile, the scent of his gardenias on her dress, were the only realities in the strange new world which she had just entered.

thoughts. She resolved to concentrate upon thoughts of James.

THE next day was a repetition of the previous one. More shopping, another luncheon, a trip to a beauty specialist for a finger wave and a manicure, a testimonial dinner, and finally, packing for the trip. Mrs. Gillepsie, too, had to be outfitted and packed, as she was invited on the vacation as a chaperon.

Lois was almost ready to collapse from weariness by the time they boarded the Atlantic City Express in Pennsylvania Station at midnight. James,

'Alice, Mr. Gillepsie, and a squad of photographers and onlookers followed them to the train. Lois was hustled to the observation platform, where still another picture was snapped.

James had boarded the train to give her last minute advice — about being careful of the night breezes, and to avoid swimming in the heat of the day. His final words touched Lois.

"I've been thinking it over," he said. "After all, I guess this little fling won't hurt you, but I'm trusting you, Lois." He pecked hastily at her left cheek, and fled as a cheer went up from the watchers.

Lois smiled tenderly after his scurrying figure. James was a dear, and she'd try to be worthy of his trust.

"I'm going down to the smoker. See you in the morning." Jerry's voice, very gruff and not at all soft and drawling, sounded in her ear.

She turned in surprise. He, too, was staring after James. His hands, where they gripped the rail of the observation car, showed white at the knuckles. He bolted off without another word.

"I wonder what was the matter with Jerry? He acted peeved about something," Lois said to her mother when the two of them had retired to their compartment.

Mrs. Gillepsie looked at her keenly. "You don't want to be thinking too much about this Jerry fellow. He's too handsome, and he's got flirty eyes. Besides, these newspaper men are an undependable lot—come to-day, gone to-morrow. Not that I don't like the boy." Her voice softened. "I do. He's the sort you can't help liking, but," firmly, "James is worth a dozen of him."

Lois agreed soberly. Her mother was right. Jerry was the kind that women just naturally loved, but she mustn't forget James, who trusted her. His farewell words came back poignantly.

ATLANTIC CITY was a blue and gold town of enchantment the next morning to a wide-eyed Lois. She and her mother were installed in a luxurious hotel on the Boardwalk.

It was headquarters for the beauty contestants. Every big city in the Union was represented by a beauty who hoped to carry off the title "Miss United States." The hotel lobby was thronged with lovely girls—blondes, brunettes, and titian-haired goddesses —who paraded to and fro under a battery of masculine eyes.

"You'll be run ragged with luncheons and dinners," Jerry told Lois; "but I'm going to steal you away some morning for a swim. And perhaps you'll give me an evening now and then."

"I'll give you lots of them if you mean it. I feel as if you were an old friend of the family when I see all these strange people around me." Lois laughed. She had been very gay ever since Jerry had appeared that morning wearing his old cheerful grin, his black mood of the evening before gone.

"You're taking chances, lady, with a statement like that. I'll be hogging all your time, and you won't have a chance to kid along the judges and the big movie men who can do things for you in a large way."

Lois made a little face. "They're all fat, and they squiggle when they walk. I don't want to kid them along. I'd rather be with you. Let's just have a grand time for these two weeks."

"Two weeks!" Jerry's face sobered. "Two weeks of heaven," he repeated

slowly. "All right," with a quick change to a feverish sort of gayety. "It's pals, playmates, and boon companions we'll be for two blessed weeks, and the future can go hang itself. An old French geezer said something about 'let's live to-day, for to-morrow we die.' That's going to be the motto for yours truly."

Lois was puzzled, but his high spirits were infectious. Gleefully they planned a swim at once.

"There's some luncheon that somebody or other is giving for the beauties. You'll have to go to that," Jerry said; "but as soon as it's over I'll nab you and we'll take a ride along the Boardwalk."

"In one of those funny chairs?" excitedly.

"Yes—and then maybe we can find some place to dance to-night if somebody doesn't stage a dinner for you."

Jerry was an ideal playmate. He was never cross, never tired, never worried about his dignity. He could enter into the most childish of sports, or he could talk seriously by the hour. She learned much about him during their long conversations, when they lay stretched out on the warm sands of the beach. He was writing his second play. His first was making the rounds of producers' offices.

"It's probably tucked away by this time in some cold storage vault where they keep the world's worst plays," he said.

"But I'm sure it's a wonderful play. It must be, if you wrote it." She said this demurely. Yet she believed it, too.

"I wish some manager would think so. It might make a lot of difference to — you and me — in several ways." He sighed.

"What ways?" Her curiosity was aroused.

He gave her a long look. Lois caught her breath. Did he mean—? No, he answered the question lightly.

"I'd buy myself a new suit of clothes, and smoke fifty-cent cigars after dinner."

"And me—what difference would it make to me?" Lois persisted in spite of a wee, small voice that warned her of the folly of such questions.

"Well." Jerry seemed to debate his answer. "Maybe I'd make you leading lady in my play and you'd become a famous actress, or—I might—" He hesitated.

Suddenly Lois was afraid of what he might say. "Come, I'll race you to the water." She sprang to her feet and raced across the sand.

THE days slipped away only too fast. Less than a week remained before the final judging. Atlantic City was abuzz with surmise. Who would be "Miss United States"? Every girl hoped for the title. Bets were placed freely on possible winners. "Miss Florida," a slender, blue-eyed blonde, and "Miss Texas," a stately brunette, were the favorites.

All the contestants were eager-eyed and nervous as the end approached. Men who were believed to have influence with the judges were besieged by flashing smiles and soft-lashed glances from the beauties.

Only Lois held herself aloof from the jealousies and struggles of the contest. She was oddly uninterested in the outcome, and made no effort to "play politics." She was so happy in the present that she had no desire to look into the future.

A bald-headed, thick-lipped man, whose name was known to movie-struck girls from coast to coast, invited her to ride with him in his expensive

sports touring car one night. She had a date with Jerry, and refused. She and Jerry were going to stroll along the Boardwalk and look at the moon that night.

"Miss Iowa," a vivacious, red-haired girl, with whom Lois had struck up a casual friendship, listened to her refusal in dismayed astonishment.

"But you shouldn't have done that," she said to Lois, when the movie magnate had gone on his way more than a little disgruntled. "He's a great friend of one of the judges, and besides that he might get you a movie test."

"But I had a date."

"I know—it's with that good-looking sheik of yours." "Miss Iowa" giggled. "Gosh, I don't blame you. He's the answer to a maiden's prayer. But," seriously, "you ought to give some time to the guys who can do you some good."

Lois shook her head. She didn't want to waste her time gold-digging some fat elderly man for beauty crowns or movie tests. She was amused and a trifle disgusted by the frank manœuverings of the girls about her. She had never dreamed that friendships and influence played such important rôles in these contests. The whole thing was amazing.

Her mail was the most astonishing part of all. Every morning a hundred or more letters came to her, along with packages of cosmetics. She was deluged with requests for her photograph, her autograph, her indorsement on various toilet articles, even with proposals of marriage. A Wyoming ranger, a Spokane shipping clerk, a Wisconsin farmer were among the lovesick youths who had become infatuated with her picture and wanted to marry her. Some of the letters begged her for donations of money.

Every morning Jerry joined her and her mother after breakfast and helped them sort over the mail. Most of it was consigned to the waste basket. A few of the love letters Lois answered personally with a kindly refusal. Jerry took care of the rest.

Just the day before the final judging, Lois received her first cash offer for an indorsement. It was from a well-known firm of beauty specialists. Jerry advised her to accept.

"Might as well," he said, "while the taking's good. If you don't get the title 'Miss United States' to-morrow, people will forget about you and you won't get any more such offers. A hundred bucks is not to be sneezed at."

"Yes, why don't you, Lois?" Mrs. Gillepsie had been listening interestedly. "A hundred dollars will come in handy when you go to buy your trousseau next winter."

Jerry crumpled the letter he was reading with savage fingers.

Mrs. Gillepsie looked over at him. A speculative gleam came into her eyes. "Of course you know, Jerry," she said sweetly, "that my little girl is going to be married next January."

He nodded without raising his eyes.

"And to such a splendid man! James is the salt of the earth. He has a wonderful job and he's going to get a raise the first of the year. He'll be able to give Lois the best of everything."

Lois walked over to the window. She was furious. Mother was just talking this way for Jerry's benefit.

Mrs. Gillepsie rattled on. "And he wrote her the sweetest letter yesterday all about the furniture he's going to buy for their little nest."

"Mother!" Lois's voice was sharp. "Jerry's not interested in all this blah about James and me."

"Oh, but every one loves a lover." Mrs. Gillepsie fairly cooed the quotation. "And I think it's so sweet to see a young man working and saving to take care of his little girl."

"James is a very fortunate man," Jerry said tonelessly.

"And Lois is a lucky little girl. James has a real future. His wife will never want for the comforts of life."

"As mine would, eh?" Jerry raised his eyes and met her gaze squarely.

Mrs. Gillepsie was somewhat taken back by the direct question. "I—I—of course, I don't know anything about that—about your prospects—"

Jerry put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a five dollar bill. "The remainder of my last week's salary and my life savings." He laughed without mirth. "No danger of getting married on that. A poor newspaper reporter like me doesn't rate a wife."

He gathered up the remaining letters. "If you'll excuse me," he said to Lois, "I'll take these over to my own room and finish them later."

LOIS turned angrily to her mother as soon as the door had closed upon him.

"What in the world," she asked, "was the idea of raving like that to Jerry about James and me?"

"Well, I just wanted to let him know how things stand."

"But he knows I'm engaged."

"It doesn't hurt to remind him again. I've got eyes in my head, Lois, and I can see the way you're mooning around these days. And it isn't right. You're an engaged girl. Besides, it's as plain as the nose on your face that Jerry's not a marrying man."

"I'm not forgetting that I'm engaged, mother," Lois said impatiently. She knew only too well that back in New York, James was waiting for her and that to-morrow—she was panic-stricken at the thought—Jerry would go out of her life forever.

"It's for your own good. I want you to be happy, Lois. You've got a fine man in James, and you can't afford to lose your head over the first handsome, flirty-eyed fellow who comes along."

"Let's not talk about it. Please!" Lois was suddenly very tired. Her anger had evaporated, leaving in its place a great weariness.

The truth in her mother's words oppressed her. She mustn't lose her head. James had trusted her to play fairly with him. Jerry could never be more to her than a pleasant playmate on a dream-like vacation.

He didn't want to be. He himself had said there was no danger of his getting married.

No, she mustn't forget James. Dear, steady James! She repeated his name to herself and tried to call up an image of his precise, sober face—but James seemed very far away. He was blotted out by a tanned young face, in which smoldered a pair of slate-colored eyes.

That night Lois and Jerry walked together for the last time on the Boardwalk. Both were very serious.

"Your last night! Your last night!" The very surf pounding against the breakwater seemed to beat out the words.

But it couldn't be the end! Lois cried to herself. Their companionship had been too perfect. She clung to the word "companionship!" She refused to listen to an inner voice which would have said "love!"

"I can't believe this is the end." Jerry echoed the cry of her heart. "These have been the most perfect two weeks in my life. They can't end. They mustn't!"

Lois said nothing. She was fighting back a lump in her throat, a mistiness in her eyes.

IN silence they stared out at the dark ocean. The surf pounded dully. Jerry's breath was coming fast.

"Lois," he said huskily after a time. "Do you remember what you told me —that first night I met you?"

She turned to him startled. "What was it? I told you lots of things."

"About that song, 'Let Me Call You Sweetheart.' I want to sing it to you, Lois. I want to pretend just for a few minutes that you're my girl. There isn't any James. There's nobody in the whole world—but you and me. Just for now. Please!"

She couldn't refuse. He was so close to her. She could feel his breath against her cheek. He reached out and took her hand. His touch was fire—delicious fire. Her heart pounded at a mad rate. She dared not look at him.

His voice rose in a crooning whisper—

Let me see the lovelight
In those eyes of blue.
Let me call you sweetheart;
I'm in love with you.

Lois gave a little choked sob as his voice trailed off. She trembled at the poignant sweetness of the song, at his nearness. Unconsciously she swayed toward him. She raised her eyes and met his. In their slate-colored depths were dark flames.

Of a sudden she was in his arms. Neither knew how it happened. He held her close, blissfully close. His lips covered hers. Lois closed her eyes. She was happy—happy—happy. A sweet languor possessed her.

He crushed her to him. She leaned her head against his shoulder. It was hard, yet infinitely restful. Her head belonged there—right above his heart. She loved him. She was his. She would follow him to the ends of the earth.

It was Jerry himself who broke the spell. "Lois, Lois—" He whispered her name hoarsely.

Then he pushed her from him.

She could only look at him, hurt and unbelieving.

"I didn't mean to do this. I—I haven't the right." He groaned. "But you're sweet, so sweet—I couldn't help it. I'm sorry, Lois."

He was apologizing for that mad, sweet kiss. Lois stared blankly. Then she remembered. His song, his kiss, had been—just pretend. And she was promised to James. She had forgotten James, but Jerry didn't forget. She was the one who had lost her head.

For one wild moment she had been ready to give up James, her whole world, just to rest her head against Jerry's shoulder. Maybe he knew that she imagined the kiss real and a token of love. He was trying to let her down easily by apologizing. Jerry was not a "marrying man."

She laughed hysterically.

Pride came to her aid, savage, wounded pride.

"Don't you think I'm a good pretender?" she asked, forcing a light tone.

"Too good," he said grimly. His face looked white and stern in the silver moonlight.

"It must have been moon madness." She wondered how she could put words together, when her heart lay cold and dead within her.

"Undoubtedly," Jerry agreed politely.

"James warned me against the night breezes. Maybe he meant the moon."

Jerry winced at the mention of the other man. Lois was glad. She wanted to hurt him. No, no! She loved him. But he didn't want her love. He had been just pretending. He was sending her back to James like an unwanted Christmas present. Of course, she belonged to James, but—that Jerry should have been the one to remember!

She gathered her soft velvet evening cape about her. "I don't think I'll take any more chances on the moon," she said. By a mighty effort she kept up her careless air. "So it's—good night and good-by!"

She stretched out a cool little hand.

Jerry snatched it in his. He bent his head. Hot lips brushed her palm. His nearness dizzied her, but she was warned this time against her own weakness. She drew her hand away sharply.

HER mother was asleep when Lois returned to the hotel. Very quietly she undressed and crawled into her own twin bed. There she lay for long hours gazing into the darkness. She couldn't sleep. She couldn't even cry.

"You certainly were a restless one last night," her mother said the next morning. "You were moaning and tossing in your sleep. It's too bad, too. You're looking real peaked this morning, just when you should look your best."

"Why?"

Lois instantly regretted her question. How stupid of her! To-day "Miss United States" was to be chosen.

Her mother blinked with surprise.

"Well, nobody could say you're losing your head over this contest." Mrs. Gillepsie laughed. "I suppose it doesn't matter much to you whether you win or lose. You always have James, and he'd be better pleased if you lost. He never did like the idea of you being a beauty queen."

Lois's lips curled in a bitter smile. Yes, she had James. She had James, when every fiber of her body cried out for Jerry!

In the bright light of the morning, she could not deceive herself. She loved Jerry. She wanted him. She'd always want him. And Jerry—he'd just pretended. He had kissed her, but he'd probably kissed lots of pretty girls in the moonlight.

Lois's pink fingernails cut her palms at the thought.

Fortunately her day was a busy one and she had little time to brood. She was rushed to a masseuse, to a hairdresser, and then was photographed again. The big contest was scheduled for three that afternoon and was preceded by a final luncheon.

Jerry telephoned briefly to say that he would be seated at the press table and would not see her until after the contest.

Lois hurried from place to place and talked and smiled, but she was moving in a daze of misery. It seemed as if she had a second self that did the expected things for her.

At two thirty the beauty contestants were sent back to the hotel, where maids gave them a last minute grooming.

"You want to smile and show your teeth when you walk in front of the judges, dearie." The attendant who was dressing Lois's hair was voluble with advice. "You're one of the prettiest girls of the bunch and you've got a good chance of winning if you just catch those judges' eyes and smile real pretty."

Lois paid little attention to the well meant counsel. She was completely disinterested in the outcome of the con-

test. Her one desire was to have it over with.

She wanted to leave Atlantic City. She hated the place. It was no longer an enchanted land. The sun was too glaring, the crowds too noisy. Her head ached. Her eyeballs burned with unshed tears.

And then she was before the judges!

SHE felt completely alien to the excited, happy girls who lined up for the promenade which was to decide the winner of the title "Miss United States." They were ordered to walk slowly along the Boardwalk until they came to the judges' stand. There they must pause briefly. A well known artist, a famous New York theatrical producer and a motion picture director were the judges.

Lois joined the processional reluctantly. Her face refused to smile.

"We're like a lot of race horses," she thought.

Her slim body burned under the hundreds of eyes. She had never before felt undressed in a bathing suit. Would it never end?

She almost ran from before the judges' stand. She had heard them whispering together about her. She couldn't remember whether she had shown her teeth or not. She didn't care.

Then she saw Jerry. He was with a group of newspaper men. His storm-cloud eyes even in the distance set that little pulse in her throat to beating. He smiled and she was aquiver from head to foot. Resolutely she looked in another direction.

The beauties huddled together and awaited the decision nervously.

"I'm so thrilled I could die," "Miss Iowa" fluttered at Lois's side. Her voice was shrill with excitement. "I went out riding last night with a fellow who said he'd say a good word for me. Maybe I— Oh!" She gave a little squeal. "I believe they're going to an-

nounce the winner. Gosh, if it's me, I'll faint dead away."

But "Miss Iowa" did not faint. She was not the chosen one.

Neither was Lois!

The stately brunette from Texas was hailed as "Miss United States," and crowned with roses. A great cheer went up.

Lois heard the decision with neither regret nor delight. Girls were sobbing all around her with disappointment. She wondered at their grief. What did the beauty contest matter? Nothing mattered—nothing! Nothing was real except Jerry, who had smiled at her with a flash of white teeth against his tanned face.

And Jerry would be gone—to-night—forever!

"I think those judges were just stupid to pick that girl. Why, you're twice as pretty!" Mrs. Gillepsie had pushed her way through the crowd and came up clucking like a ruffled mother hen.

"I don't care. I think you're a lot more upset about it than I am." Lois smiled at her mother's attitude. The slight to her child had aroused all Mrs. Gillepsie's maternal fury. I—"

Words died on Lois's lips. Just beyond her mother she saw Jerry shouldering his way through the beauties and their friends and consolers.

She was tempted to run. But it was impossible to escape through this mob. Besides, she would have to see him for a last time. She forced her stiff face to smile.

"SORRY it's condolences, instead of congratulations, Lois," he said in a formal tone. "It's really too bad you didn't get the crown of 'Miss United States.' I've been talking to one of the judges. He said you'd have had a chance if you'd looked a little more cheerful."

"I don't think Lois wanted to win." Mrs. Gillepsie was glad to put this interpretation on her daughter's failure. "She wasn't a bit interested. She's different from a lot of these girls who haven't anything to look forward to."

"Yes, I have James." Lois ventured a glance at Jerry as she said it.

His face was expressionless. He pulled out his watch ostentatiously. "Got a story to write on the winner," he said, "so I'll have to amble along." He bowed to Lois and her mother. "I've enjoyed our friendship very much and I hope to see you some day in New York."

That was what people always said when they never meant to see you again. Lois bit her lip to keep back a cry of anguish.

As from afar she heard her mother saying, "We've certainly enjoyed knowing you, and we appreciate the kindness of your paper."

Lois knew that she must say something. "And that goes for me." The words came jerkily from her dry throat. "Do look us up in New York."

That was the answer to his "I hope to see you some day." It meant "don't trouble yourself."

They were shaking hands. He was going. The crowd swallowed him up.

Lois held herself rigid. She wanted to scream, to run after him. It was impossible that he was gone. Last night he had taken her in his arms. His lips had burned against hers. Her head had rested on his shoulder. And now they had parted with nothing but meaningless, stupid words!

"Well, I suppose we might as well be heading for home," Mrs. Gillepsie said briskly.

"Yes, there's nothing else."

She found some relief in the packing which awaited them at the hotel. She threw her clothes into bags with nervous haste. She was going to run away from her heartache. Perhaps back in New York she would find forgetfulness.

Just before they left, a telegram from James came for Lois:

> Glad contest is over. Will be waiting your return. Regards.

Lois read the ten brief words gravely. Out of her own unhappiness she found a new tenderness toward James. Perhaps he loved her—even the way she loved Jerry. She must be very good to James.

She wired him to meet her at the Pennsylvania Station the next morning.

ONCE back in New York, life settled into its old routine for Lois. She received a couple of offers to appear at neighborhood moving picture houses, but these she refused. She wanted her old familiar surroundings. The beauty contest had brought her nothing but sorrow. The sooner she forgot it the better.

As the president of Peerless had promised her, a position was waiting for her in her old office as receptionist. There was a five dollar raise, too. Lois went back to work gratefully.

The girls besieged her at first with questions about Atlantic City and the contest. She answered them as best she could, describing the town, the various beauty queens, the luncheons she had attended and the queer letters she had received.

"But didn't you meet any millionaires?" Mollie Kramer, as pudgy, good-hearted and eager as ever, was interested in the romantic side of the adventure. "I thought maybe you'd be wearing a different ring when you came back."

Lois shook her head laughingly. Jerry was not a millionaire, certainly. She would never tell any one about Jerry.

Mollie was disappointed. "You ought to have had at least one hot love affair out of the trip."

As the days passed, questions became fewer. Had it not been for the persistent ache in her heart, Lois could have believed that her bright interlude was truly a dream. Nothing had changed. She went to work every morning and came home at night to the familiar family dinner table. On Wednesdays and Saturdays James called.

Lois thought sometimes that he seemed changed. He was unusually quiet, even for James. Perhaps he sensed a difference in her, and was worrying. She tried to make amends for her disloyal heart by an increased sweetness toward him.

Even Alice noticed her sister's new gentleness. "You seem to appreciate James now," she said, "after running around with a lot of newspaper bums."

"James is a dear," Lois said quietly.

She decided it was best to ignore the slur against Jerry. It was too easy to quarrel with Alice, for her sister was growing very crabbed and sarcastic of late. She had taken to long spells of sulkiness, and spent most of her evenings alone, rarely appearing even to greet James.

She acted almost angrily one evening when he found her in the living room.

"But you're early." Her tone was panicky. "I didn't expect to see you."

"No, our clock is slow. My watch says just eight thirty," Lois said, smiling. "James is always on the dot."

She wondered at Alice's disturbed manner and James's obvious embarrassment.

He fidgeted with his hat. "Don't you think you'd better get your wraps, Lois, if we plan to make the nine o'clock show?" he asked nervously.

Lois started obediently for her hat and coat, but stopped as the telephone shrilled through the house.

Her mother answered it. "Just a minute. I'll call her." She motioned to Lois.

Lois picked up the receiver. "Yes?"

"Lois? Is it really you?"

SHE caught the telephone table for support. That voice! It was Jerry calling to her across the wires. She couldn't speak.

He went on quickly. "Can I see you—to-night? I've got something to tell you."

"But I was just going out."

"Please! It won't take long."

She could picture him as clearly as if he were before her, his tanned, eager face, those warm, slate-colored eyes. His voice, that soft 'cello voice of his, pleaded with her. She was being very foolish, very weak, but she couldn't do otherwise. She must see him — just this once.

"Just for a minute," she said.

"I'll be there as fast as a Bronx express will carry me up from Park Row." He hung up as if afraid she would change her mind.

She turned back to James. "I'm sorry," she said. And she really was. "But won't you please take Alice instead to the show to-night? You see there's somebody coming to—to—" She stumbled over her explanation and decided to tell him the whole truth. "It's the reporter who wrote me up for the beauty contest."

"Lois Gillepsie," Alice flared up in a white rage, "are you trying to give James a stand-up for another fellow, after all he's done, the way he's sacrificed himself—"

"Now, Alice," James interrupted her, "you know we agreed never to tell Lois a word about that."

"I know! I must be crazy!" Alice's voice broke.

With a low, heart-broken sob she fled from the room.

"James, what did she mean?" Lois demanded tensely. Understanding was slowly coming to her.

James's face turned beet red. "Nothing," he said. His manner was guilt-stricken.

"You're not telling me the truth. I'm going to find out." She hurried after Alice. James tried to stop her, but she shook off his detaining hands.

Alice was lying face down on the bed. She was crying in a stifled, hopeless fashion.

"Alice dear, what is it?" Lois's hand dropped to her sister's shoulder gently.

The other girl buried her face deeper in the pillow.

"Come, now, 'fess up." Lois caressed her hair as she coaxed. "It's James, isn't it?"

A muffled "Yes" came from the pillow.

"You're in love with each other."

"Yes, but we never meant you to know."

Alice sat up and brushed the tears from her eyes.

"It just sort of happened while you were away. He was disappointed in you, and somehow he began to turn to me. We were suited to each other, I guess, but he isn't a man who'd jilt a girl. He said the only square thing was to forget our love. I've tried to—

honest, Lois, but it's been hard—so hard."

Lois kissed her sister tenderly. No one knew better than she how hard it was to forget love.

"My dear, my dear," she cried, "what a mess we've been making of things!" She pulled Alice from the bed, wiped the tears from her eyes. "Now go in to James. He's yours, dear."

She gave Alice a little shove toward the living room.

"But what are you going to do?" Alice hesitated, still doubtful of her own happiness.

"Me?" Lois said dreamily. "I'm going to wait—for Jerry!"

SHE slipped out of the service entrance of the apartment and perched herself on the topmost stair of the four flights. She was waiting for Jerry. He'd be here any minute.

What did he have to tell her? She dared not hope too much, but it was enough for the moment that she would see him. Her face burned. Her hands were like ice.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs. Lois drew back farther into the corner, shivering with mingled fear and hope.

It was there that Jerry found her.

"What in the world?" He had almost stumbled over her.

"There's no place for us inside," she said in confusion. The absurdity of her position on the stairs suddenly struck her. "Alice and James have the living room, you see."

"Alice and James?" Jerry stared.

She nodded. "I—I've been jilted."

"Why, that miserable, yellow cur of a James! Did he—"

"Sh-h-h!" Lois stopped his angry words. "It's all right. I made him do it."

"You made him? You don't care? Lois!" Jerry dropped to her side. "Was it because—did you—do you—I mean could you—love me?"

Lois lifted shining brown velvet eyes to his. In them lay his answer.

"My girl! Really mine this time!"

She was back in his arms. Her head was on his shoulder—where it belonged.

"But, dearest, you had something to tell me." She looked up dreamily into his eyes.

"Oh, gosh, yes; imagine forgetting! Lois, I've sold my play. It's going to be produced. Do you know what that means?" He laughed happily. "It means that we can get married right away, and I can give you all the things a lovely girl wants and should have. I didn't dare tell you I loved you before and ask you to struggle along on a newspaper man's salary."

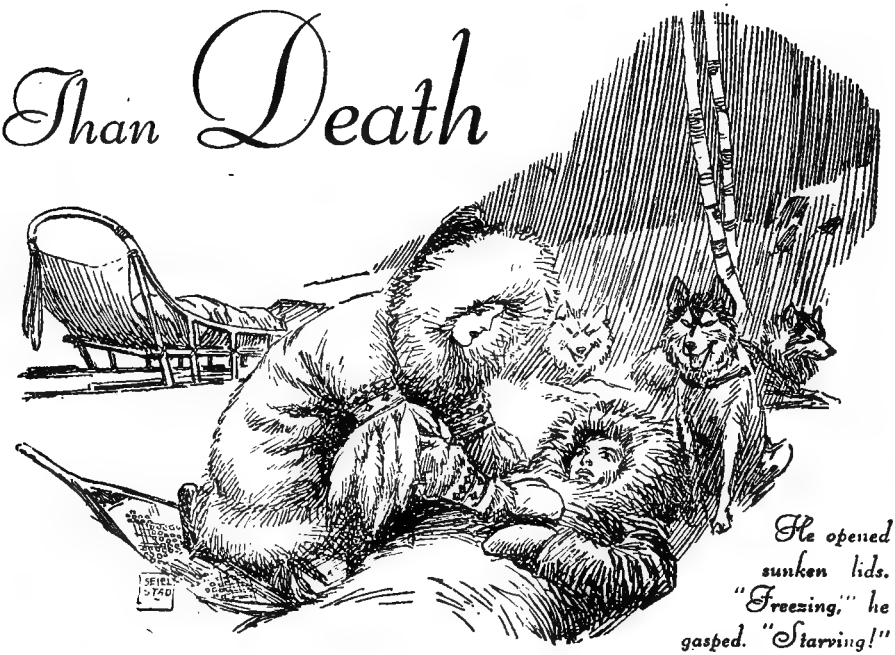
"And I thought you didn't want to get married—that it was all just pretend."

"Pretend! I adored you, Lois. I've been nearly crazy when I thought of your marrying James. To-day, when I heard about my play, I made up my mind that I'd come and take you away from him by main force, if necessary."

"Then you do love me?" Lois wanted him to say it again.

He did—but not with words.

Love Stronger Than Death



He opened sunken lids. "Freezing," he gasped. "Starving!"

Where the wolf pack howls and icy Death takes the trail, a girl alone battles man and nature for her right to love

By Floria Howe Bruess

"I WON'T, I tell you—I *won't* marry him!" Harriet Blanchard stood rigid before her father, dark eyes flaming, cheeks flushed, lips compressed into so straight a line their soft, swift curves were lost.

Silence.

Dispassionately her father glanced at her. Then, under lowered brows, looked at the man lounging against a counter in the big trade house.

The lounger spoke quietly: "I'll bring up the missioner from the village, so Harriet an' I can get married. If I leave now I'll be back by sunset tomorrow."

"Didn't you hear me?" the girl almost shouted. "*I won't marry you!*

I hate you! Besides, you're old enough to be my father."

She turned desperately to her father. "Why do you insist on my marrying a man I detest?" she demanded passionately.

The trader fumbled for a match that he struck for his pipe.

Harriet—or Harry, as she was called in that Northern wilderness—watched his deliberate movements, her eyes filled with mutinous lights. In her flannel blouse, cloth breeches and leggings she looked not unlike a tall, handsome boy.

She turned with a lithe, tiger-like grace and swiftness, faced Jim Stoleman. Contemptuously she scrutinized his thick-shouldered parka-clad figure, her beautiful dark eyes at last resting on his thick-jowled, pock-marked face.

She hated him!

Confidently he met her gaze. Let her struggle and fight, she would still belong to him, the only woman he had ever wanted for his wife.

"You've had your say, now I'll have mine." Her father's voice fell unhurried, calm. "You're goin' to marry Jim to-morrow. He's a good man. He's got one of the finest cabins in the North an' he'll take good care of you. You've been a worry to me ever since your ma died. You an' me don't think alike. We don't talk the same language ever since I was fool enough to send you down to the Post school."

He drew on his pipe, expelled a cloud of acrid smoke, went on: "Since you got some learnin' you think you're too good for Jim. An' not only that, but I've seen you an' Dan Graves together, too often. I won't let you hang around that no-account, one-room cabin trapper, who's probably married already to some other woman."

"That's not true," Harriet interrupted fiercely. Her hands clenched and her small, firm breast rose stormily as the two men laughed.

"Isn't it, though? Well, you an' Jim are goin' to get hitched up to-morrow. Then I quit worryin' about you."

TERROR lay in the girl's eyes as the man's voice fell curt, with a note of finality. Her eyes moved swiftly like the eyes of some trapped thing, fear, horror in their dark pool-like depths.

Well she knew this grim, determined man. A man whom the Indians and even the half-breeds respected. A promise was a promise; he had never been known to violate his given word. And he had promised Jim that she should marry him.

"Father," Harriet's voice came low, husky. "Is my happiness nothing to you? How can you force the lifelong misery on me that I shall know if I marry Jim? I loathe him. I can't bear—"

"You'll get over that."

The man paused as the door opened, bringing a breath of the Arctic as the wind swept in the big trade room. Two fur parka-clad Indians entered. The trader looked at Harriet under lowering brows.

"Go to the cabin an' fix supper for Jim. He'll be leavin' in an hour."

Harriet turned and with her free, superb step walked to the door. She caught her seal parka from where it hung on a hook near the door and pulled it over her head, adjusted the big hood edged with fox, then stepped out into the gloom of the late afternoon.

The wind with its ice-laden breath tore at her, buffeting every step. When she reached the cabin her white cheeks

were flushed with rose from the biting February day.

WHILE her thoughts flashed from one plan to another, only to dismiss all of them as impossible, the girl set about the supper preparations, her mind groping as she worked.

It was a cheery cabin, Harriet's home. Heads of deer and wolves ornamented the walls of the big main room. Deep bearskin rugs lay on the floor, warm and soft under moccasined feet. Large deep chairs, a long table made from a split log. A wide couch, fur-covered and piled with gay colored pillows.

Shelves holding dog-eared books lined one side, and—greatest of marvels for that far Northern country—a phonograph, with a hundred records, stood near the big stone-hooded hearth.

THE room glowed in the flickering fire and candle light when the door opened and Jim entered without the formality of a knock.

In the little kitchen stood the table laid for supper. A big bowl of stewed caribou meat, its rich gravy thickened with dried corn, peas and rice, stood steaming its fragrance in the center of the table. A platter of fluffy white biscuits stood beside a pint cup of hot black tea.

"This is what I'm goin' to have all the time, after to-morrow," Jim said, as he pulled off his parka and lowered himself into a chair.

"A fine little supper waitin' for me an' a fine little wife waitin' with a kiss—"

He reached out long, gorilla-like arms as Harriet passed the table, and wrapped those arms around her, holding the girl in a vise-like embrace.

"I'll have a kiss now, Harry, my girl," he said, his small, pig-like eyes suddenly hot.

"Let me go, you beast!" the girl panted, pulling away from him, her eyes half closed as though to shut out the sight of his heavy pock-marked face and glittering eyes.

As his lips found her cheek, she raised her clenched fist and struck him, full in the face. Slowly he released her, put a hand up to the bruised cheek.

"You'll pay for that, you young she-wolf. You'll pay for that to-morrow!"

There was no warmth in the eyes now that stared unwinking at her defiant face. There was a chill of raw steel, sinister in portent.

"I'll tame you until you come cringin'. The time will come when you'll be only too glad to have a kiss from me, you vixen—"

Harriet ran from the kitchen. The slam of her bedroom door shook the house. Jim heard the bolt fall to. For a moment he stared past the kitchen, then settled himself at the table and attacked the savory meal.

"She'll have to marry me. John promised it, and she's under age. She has to obey him an', by heaven, I'll pay her for that blow. Me struck by a woman! If it had been a man I'd have twisted his neck. But I'll do more to her. I'll twist her heart. I know she loves Dan Graves—if she'd been of age even her dad couldn't have made her marry me. Not even her dad, an' she's afraid of him. He's the only thing on earth she *is* afraid of. But she'll be afraid of *me!*"

LOCKED in her room, face pressed against the glazed window, Harriet heard his heavy tread as he crossed the main room to the door.

She heard the yelp of his sled dogs,

heard the high musical tinkle of harness bells as the dogs leapt forward in obedience to his "Mush, you Ginger. Get on there, Brandy. Mush!" She heard the slip of the sled's runners on the hard crusted snow. Listened until they died in the wind.

How silent was the house. Only the tapping of gaunt tree branches on the roof; a tapping like that of skeleton fingers. Yes, that was it. Death, Harriet thought. No other release. Yet she was so young, so filled with zest of life. Death was horrible!

Her eyes shuddered away from the razor-edged skinning knife that lay on her table. No, no, not suicide, and yet not marriage to that monster either. What to do!

For a moment Dan's face swam before her vision. The merry young chap so quick to laugh; the dark spirited face set with intense deep eyes; black hair growing like a cloud; strong, stalwart grace of bearing due to perfect muscular control.

She drew a shaking breath.

Did he love her, love her in the only way she would accept, wholly, completely, faithfully? He had sworn repeatedly that he did, his warm, eager young lips on hers.

Yet, so many had said this thing that her father repeated an hour ago. Married to another woman? He had sworn it was false. But so lightly had he sworn, a laugh on his lips, in his eyes.

When she became of age they were to marry. What matter if his cabin were small and his trapping barely met his needs. She would see to it that he extended his trap lines and so reaped a richer harvest in fine pelts. Another room could be built on to the small cabin. Yet even the one room, with love, trust, and faith to make it beautiful—

Harriet drew herself up sharply. To-morrow night she would be that horrible man's wife!

Oblivious of the cold in her room; oblivious of the voice of the wind; deaf to the long-drawn aching howl of a wolf pack prowling on its nocturnal hunt, she sat, hands clenched, staring before her with wide, dark eyes, face white in the darkness.

WHEN, later, her father stamped into the cabin for his meal, Harriet rose, unbolted her door, heated the food and served him. She sat beside him, eating a little, silent and white.

As her father rose from the table he said: "I'm goin' back to the trade house. I may be late. The Indians said a sled of furs are comin' in to-night. I'll wait up for them."

"I'm tired," Harriet returned quietly. "I shall go to bed."

He looked at her approvingly. No more pleading, no more storming. Good! He knew she would come to her senses.

"That's right. Good night," he said.

Harriet, clearing the table, made no response. She heard the door close behind him.

Then swiftly she made a pack. She pulled on her parka, removed her shoes and leggings, thrust her feet into warm high-buckled moccasins, took a pair of snowshoes, slung her pack over her back, caught up her rifle and left the cabin.

At the kennels she called her four dogs. Dogs she had raised from birth and which belonged to her. Harnessing them swiftly, heart racing, breath coming pantingly, she stepped into the long, high sled wherein her pack, snowshoes and rifle had been deposited.

Then she gave the command to "mush," which means "move along."

In a moment the gloom had swallowed them. Four racing dogs and a desperate girl alone on the great white trail!

"I will go to Dan. When he knows he will hide me some place, he will protect me. He loves me. Only a few months and my father cannot make me marry Jim."

"Mush, Susie! Faster, Scottie. Mush!" she called, her voice high in the wind.

TOM BLANCHARD sat by the big sheet-iron stove in the trade house, awaiting the sled loaded with furs. Finally he rose restlessly.

"She was too meek," he muttered aloud. "'Tisn't like Harry. But pshaw, I'm gettin' fancies! She knows she got to marry Jim an' has stopped fightin', that's all. I'll feel a lot better when I know Harry is married to a man like Jim. He'll always be a good provider. He's mad in love with her, an' I'm glad he's an older man. He'll know better how to manage her. When she gets used to him she'll like him better.

"I'll be glad when my girl is settled. I'm gettin' pretty old. An' this isn't a country for a white girl to live alone. The Indians are all right, but those tricky breeds—an' Harry's the prettiest girl for a hundred miles around."

His slow mutter ceased. He raised his head, listened to the high wailing cry of a distant cougar. "Somehow, I'm uneasy. I'll go up to the cabin a minute—"

He drew on his parka, stepped out into the bitter night.

The cabins of Indians and half-breeds, clustered in the little clearing, were dark, but half way to his cabin Blanchard saw the light of a candle flickering in his home. He paused, stared at it.

"Pshaw, she's all right! Reading one of her fool books, I'll bet. I'm goin' back to the trade house."

The night crackled with frost. The stars, frozen eyes of the night, gazed down on an ice-bound world. The aurora, splendid, barbaric, threw its banners of rainbow hues across the deep sky.

SOMETIMES riding in the sled, sometimes in snowshoes walking swiftly beside her dogs when the intense air made action more comfortable, Harriet went through the silent forest.

One hour, two, three—when she left the trail, crossed to a small ice-bound lake. Beyond that lake stood Dan's cabin. She was on his trapping territory.

"Fortunately I've met no one. That's a good omen," she mused. "How surprised Dan will be to see me. He will know what to do. He will find a way to protect me from Jim. Dan loves me. He has told me so a hundred times—"

On the shore of the lake she followed a worn path to the cabin that sat like a squat black insect on a field of white.

But look! There was candle light in the cabin. Harriet drew a quick breath. Dan was still up. How good! And as she gazed she saw sparks shoot up from the chimney.

"He has just laid a fresh log on the fire," she murmured. "Perhaps he is reading. Dan is like me, he reads during the long winter nights."

Her heart raced. New warmth suffused her cold body. Even her fingers, that felt like lumps of lead, tingled in this amazing new warmth.

She had stripped the bells from the dogs' harness so as to travel quietly. Like ghosts of dark shapes, so noiseless they were, she and they drew opposite that lighted cabin.

"I'll look in and see what he is doing," Harriet told herself, eyes glowing with excitement, with happy anticipation. "Then I'll tap on the window."

She almost giggled in her joy. Nothing to fear now—Dan would protect her; he would know what to do.

LEAVING the dogs a few feet from the window, she stole noiselessly to the lighted pane, dropped on her knees under it, then raised herself until her eyes were on a level with the frosted glass.

At first the lighted room was a blur, but by breathing her hot excited breath on the glass she cleared a little space and could see within.

Seated before the great crackling fire in a low, wide chair sat Dan. His head was thrown back, showing his splendid brown throat. He was laughing. He turned his head, evidently spoke to some one. Harriet could not see the entire room.

Then a girl dressed in a short fringed skirt, a red woolen shirt opened at the neck to show a young full throat, ran to Dan and threw her arms around his neck, her pretty face upturned.

While Harriet gazed, stunned and incredulous, Dan's arms went around the girl and he pressed his lips to hers. Then the trader's daughter noticed a plain gold band on one of the fingers which were mischievously rumpling Dan's hair. *So he was married, after all,* and the mysterious wife had turned up at last!

It was too much! Harriet attempted to crawl away, but it seemed all power had left her limbs. She sank in a huddled heap. For a moment her eyes closed; the radiant flush receded. She became deadly white.

After a moment her eyes opened and she gazed about. There was something terrible in that gaze; something that told of betrayed love and utter disillusion. She had seen hopes shattered, dreams fall in ruins, faith burned to ashes, all in a brief moment.

As the biting wind found her flesh Harriet stirred slowly, painfully. Like a woman grown suddenly old, she crawled to her sled and dogs.

One more glance at that cabin, then her dark eyes turned toward the little lake and the trail that lay beyond, shimmering in the pale starlight and the rays of the aurora.

High courage had ever been hers, but do you wonder that for the moment she felt panic and hopelessness sweep over her?

The dogs, coming to their feet as she stood near them, moved restlessly. Their questioning eyes were fixed on her still face, on the eyes that stared ahead. She stood motionless so long that a whine rose in their throats.

Finally Harriet gathered herself together. She called to the dogs softly, her voice so hoarse she could not have known it for her own.

They moved across the lake, noiseless as they had come, dark shadowy wraiths. On the trail the animals turned their heads expectantly homeward, but Harriet called, "Gee, Susie," and the lead dog turned to the right.

"No, we don't go home. I have no home to go to now," the girl said aloud, stonily. "It is dangerous on the trail, a girl alone, but nothing is as terrible as marriage with Jim Stoleman.

"Mush, Susie! Get on, Dandy,

Scottie! We're still fresh and we'll travel all night. I'll go to the good missionary at the Post, but it will be only by God's grace that I shall travel that long distance. If only I had brought a sleeping bag! Mush, Dandy! Hi, hi, Susie!"

The dogs scampered up the hard crusted trail, their breath floating behind like ribbons of smoke. At the gee-pole Harriet walked, her dark burning eyes fixed ahead. It seemed that white, still face was as one dead: only the eyes lived. Eyes tortured, yet burning with indomitable courage.

BOB WILLIAMS, physician from Elkwan River post, on his way to Port Albany, stopped wearily. His haggard eyes searched the trail.

"Three days and not a soul has passed. It seems that all life has gone from the earth."

He sank to the snow, sat motionless, unable to move, extreme weariness holding him. Never before had he traveled afoot so continuously during his three years as physician to the Port.

"I must rest," he muttered. "And rest means I must have fire or I'll stiffen with ice under this frost. Only one match left!"

He raised young though sunken eyes to the lowering sky. Then, with shaking hands, drew his match box from his parka jacket.

On the river shore, protected by fallen logs, lay a deposit of dry sticks and twigs. He rose stiffly, with great difficulty, gathered several large pieces of wood and threw them on the top of the snow for a foundation for a young fire. Then gathered twigs and sticks.

He touched the lighted match to a piece of birch bark. It flamed instantly. Placing it on the foundation, he fed the young flame with the tiniest twigs. Then he added sticks and soon the fire was blazing merrily.

He sat so close to the fire that the fur of his parka was scorched. Gradually the warmth permeated his chilled body.

"I'll keep it going day and night. I can live without food for days, but I'd freeze in ten minutes without fire when I can't travel any longer."

The snow on a tree branch overhead loosened as the warmth of the fire beneath ascended. Slowly it slid, then gathering momentum, it hurled itself from the branch, fell on the fire beneath. In an instant the blaze was drowned in the snow!

With horrified eyes Bob sat staring at his drenched fire. Then he turned and buried his head in his arms.

After a little time he did not feel the withering cold so keenly. A faint warmth was pervading him. He recognized it as the first warning that he was freezing, but when he tried to move he could not.

IT was Susie, Harriet's lead dog, who saw him first. Susie stopped abruptly, throwing her teammates on their haunches, hackle fur bristling, a low growl in her throat.

"Susie, why are you stopping? Mush!" Harriet cried sharply.

But the dog refused to move. The girl sprang from her sled, walked up to the dog and followed her eyes. Then she, too, saw the exhausted traveler.

"A man! On the trail without dogs or pack. Is he dead?"

Swiftly she bent over him, pushed the hood back from his face.

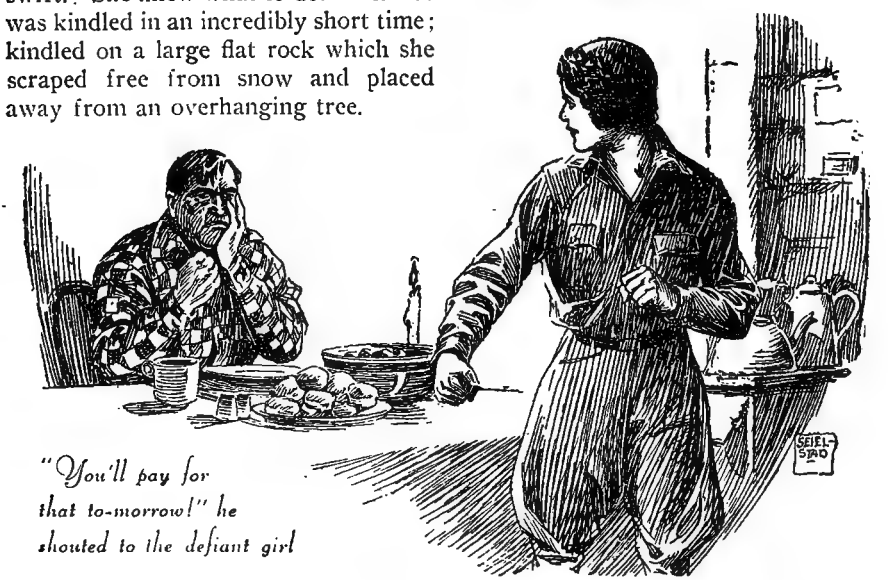
It was a young face, with thick blond hair covering a finely shaped head. The nostrils were blue and pinched, the lips cracked and blackened by frost.

"He's alive! His heart is beating!" Harriet cried aloud.

The sound aroused Bob. He opened sunken lids and stared at Harriet from dark, blue, glazing eyes.

"Freezing!" he gasped. "Starving!"

To this girl, raised in the Northern wilderness, action was thorough and swift. She knew what to do. Her fire was kindled in an incredibly short time; kindled on a large flat rock which she scraped free from snow and placed away from an overhanging tree.



"You'll pay for that to-morrow!" he shouted to the defiant girl

She pulled Bob to its radiant heat, wrapped him in the blanket she took from her sled. Filling the tin from her pack with snow, she set it on the fire to melt.

When the water heated she thawed the meat in her food kit. Soon a strong broth was ready.

WARMED by the fire, strength returned to the young physician. When Harriet fed him the steaming broth, together with small pieces of Northern hare, he was able to talk.

"Was on my way to Port Albany. Was assigned there for medical duty; tickled to death. It's a much better job than Elkwan Post doctor. But had bad luck. Dogs, sled, everything in it, went down in one of those treacherous warm undercurrents in the river. Was traveling the river ice trail—"

He paused and Harriet nodded. Well she knew of that strange phenomenon of Northern waters. The thin ice crust, deceiving, treacherous, covering the warm underflow beneath. Many men had been lost in that way.

"I was walking on ahead or I'd have gone down, too. Was about in when you came, young fellow."

Harriet started. *Young fellow!*

But shapeless parkas and knee-high moccasins are unrevealing as to the sex of the wearer. And naturally, a man would not dream that a girl would be alone on the trail a hundred miles from the nearest Post settlement.

It was just as well. He was a stranger to her. She did not know what type of man he might be.

"What's your name, my boy, and where are you bound?" Bob asked.

"They call me Harry. And I'm on my way to—"

She halted, struck by a thought. To give more time to that thought, she sprang to her feet, walked to the river beach and picked up wood.

Gradually that thought developed into decision. Why not? At least she would not dismiss the probability until to-morrow.

The day was almost spent. Soon night would fall, crushing the light. She was tired. The dogs, too, needed rest and food. They would camp here to-night. By morning she would be able to estimate the character of this man. He was a Post physician. Surely he was a man of high type. No others were engaged for such arduous work; Harriet knew that much.

Staggering under a great load of wood, she returned to the fire. Bob looked at her but did not repeat his question. He had forgotten it in the bodily comfort that was his.

"If I were a cat I'd purr," he said, a smile lighting his lean young face.

"Comfy?" she asked.

"I say, that sounds like a girl," Bob said jocosely. "You should have been a girl, Harry. You're too good-looking for a boy." He watched her idly. "Making another fire?"

"Yes, we'll sleep between them. Double protection against cold and—wolves."

"But one fire is enough. We can both roll together in this big double blanket of yours and wolves won't come near a fire, no matter how small."

"I know. I was born in Montana, but I've lived here since I was a child, and sometimes two fires are better than one. Besides, I'd rather sleep alone." She looked at him somberly.

"Guess you're the boss just now." Bob sighed wearily, yet happily. The warmth was easing his aching muscles; strength was returning from the hot food he had consumed. He pillowed his head on his arm and fell asleep.

IT was sunrise when Bob awakened, to find Harriet bending over the fire preparing breakfast.

For a time he studied the dark, beautiful face; the eyes that held a heartache. "That fellow's unhappy about something," he mused. "Poor kid! So young to be alone on the trail—"

He sat up. "Do you know, Harry," he began abruptly, "that you saved my life? You're only a kid, but you have saved a human life and one that is more or less valuable to the North. You know it's hard to get good doctors up here. They shy at the loneliness."

Harriet turned quickly. "Awake, I see, and much stronger," she smiled. It was a bleak little smile, yet she marveled. She had never expected to smile again.

"Breakfast is ready," she went on.

He moved to the fire. "I should say I am a lot stronger. Muscles of my legs are about normal now."

As they breakfasted, Bob watched Harriet across the flames, and wondered at the somber expression, the hurt look in her eyes.

Then he began talking. Told her he had lost both parents when a child. There was a legacy, small, but enough to see him through college. Of his desire to practice his profession in the North, where he had heard physicians were so greatly needed.

Eyes on the fire, Harriet listened. When he fell silent she said, "We had better stop here another day and night. You will be able to travel then."

"Won't I be holding you up?"

"It doesn't matter."

She rose, busied herself around the camp, gathering wood, then with her rifle went in search of rabbits.

The day passed quickly. Again they sat in comradely fashion by the fire as they ate supper.

"You know, Harry, I feel wonderfully drawn to you. I feel you and I have been pals months on end. For a fact, I'm fond of you. The North does that. Breeds swift friendships, swift love and swift hate." He paused, watching her.

Harriet raised gravely questioning eyes. "Do you like it here? Are you happy in this country?"

"It's harder than I expected it would be," Bob replied. "The long winters—but yes, I like it. I don't want to leave it now. The North gets into a fellow's blood. If I left, I'd come back."

"'I've bid you good-by but—I can't,'" Harriet quoted softly. She rose, laid fresh wood on the two fires. "I'm going to sleep," she added. "Tired. I think you had better, too. Good night."

She wrapped the blanket around her, pillowed her head on her arms. For a time she stared out into the dark forest; then tired nature asserted itself and she fell asleep.

THE sun shining on Harriet's face awakened her. She sat up abruptly, stared at the fire (one had died out) blazing merrily. Stared at Bob, sitting Indian fashion on his heels broiling a fish over the hot edge-coals.

She looked at it incredulously. "Where did you get that fish?" she demanded.

He grinned boyishly. "A couple of Indians came by, about dawn. I awakened; didn't want to rouse you, you were so dead asleep. I took them down the trail a ways, then had a great parley with 'em. We're pretty well fixed now. Got another blanket and one sleeping-bag, some meal, tea, and half a dozen fish. The Indians caught them through the ice yesterday. They're fine. Smell good?"

His voice was so gay, his smile so infectious, that involuntarily Harriet's lips curved.

"Atta boy! I like you best when you smile. You're too darn young to have a gloomy face. Come on, breakfast's ready. Made some meal cakes and the tea is brewing."

Later as they ate beside the roaring fire: "Say, Harry, I wish you were going on to Port Albany. I'd like to have you with me. Better for both of us. You know what the North says: 'Danger for a man alone on the winter trail.'" He looked at the quiet dark face opposite him.

Harriet's decision had been made. "I'm going on to the Post," she agreed quietly.

Why not? She could live there. Earn her living as a teacher, for teachers were in great demand and hard to procure.

"Sure enough? I'm glad to hear that, Harry." His lean young face had suddenly lightened.

Silently Harriet nodded. Then she breathed deeply the air that exhilarated like wine. Somehow her black depression, the bitterness in her heart seemed lighter. Then, like a blanket, fear fell on her.

"Which way did those Indians go?" she asked swiftly.

"West." Bob was getting the pack together, did not look at her as he spoke. "I'll feed the dogs and then

we'll pull out. Must travel hard all day. Take advantage of this fine weather."

"WEST!" Harriet breathed sharply. No doubt Jim had taken the trail in search of her. Jim Stoleman was not a man to be balked. She shivered slightly as she imagined the rage that was his when he returned to the cabin and found it empty.

"West!" The trail he would take. He would meet the Indians, inquire if they had seen any one on the trail. There was not a chance that he would go east, for the east trail led onto the wind-swept ice of Hudson's Bay. No shelter, no protection. He would know she would not go east.

"Did you mention that some one was with you?" she asked, steadying her voice.

"I just said there were two of us," Bob assented carelessly.

"Two!" That would be clew enough for Jim. He, owner of the fastest dogs in the North, would follow that clew. Unconsciously Harriet groaned.

Bob, feeding the dogs, turned swiftly.

"Why, what's wrong, Harry?" He came to her across the snow, looked with startled eyes at the white face and wide dark eyes.

"Bob, you'd better go on alone. There's a man—an enemy of mine on the trail. It might be dangerous for you—I'd have to fight it out with him—"

Bob's eyes narrowed as he stared at the pallid and grim-lipped Harriet. Stared at the wide, beautiful eyes that met his, fairly, squarely, but with a terrible fear in their pool-like depths.

He stepped close, threw an arm about her shoulders. "All right, my lad. If you have a scrap coming, I'm right here to help you through. I'm your friend, Harry, that's all I need to say."

A glow warmed Harriet. Here was indeed a safe man to travel with. Then suddenly bitterness swept over her. She saw again through that frosted window pane, Dan's laughing face; saw the arms twined around his neck, the wedding ring.

Savagely she shook off that vision. "I've warned you," she said, her voice suddenly hard. "You'd better go on alone—"

"I'm not," Bob interrupted. "I'm sticking right with you!"

He gave the girl's shoulders a comradely squeeze, then turned and finished his task.

Within a few minutes the sled was repacked, snowshoes were donned and they were traveling swiftly, Harriet at the lead dog's head, Bob at the gee-pole.

THEY had covered many miles when they stopped for night camp. As they were gathering wood for their fire Bob remarked: "Hope we run across a moose or caribou to-morrow. Some fresh meat wouldn't go bad, hey?"

"I hope we do," Harriet assented. She looked speculatively at the sky, listened intently to the low drone of the wind. "Weather is going to change, Bob. A blizzard will be on us in a day or two."

"We'll ride it out. We're only about three days now from the Post. We'll hole-in some place when the snow hits us."

Hungrily they ate supper. After feeding their dogs they piled up wood and the two healthy, tired young folk turned in for the night, Harriet warm

and snug in the sleeping-bag, Bob rolled up in blankets.

They awakened simultaneously at dawn.

"You get breakfast, Harry. I'm going over that hill and see if I can get a glimpse of a caribou. I thought I heard a herd passing not far away last night—"

She nodded. Bob, with Harriet's rifle in the crook of his arm, strode over the hill. She watched him disappear, then hurried to the sled, opened a bag, extracted a comb.

"I've been dying to comb my hair," she murmured softly. "Haven't had my parka hood off since I met Bob."

She threw back the big fur hood and loosened the two long silky black braids that were wound round her head.

"How good this comb feels," she murmured. She heard a series of gunshots in the distance. "He's found game. Will trail them, no doubt; I've lots of time."

The eyes that had been so somber filled with mischievous light. "Wouldn't Bob be stunned if he saw me now? Couldn't pass for a boy with all this hair. Wish I could wear it short like the girls in the outside world do. But up here we need our hair to keep our heads warm—"

"*Harry!*"

Bob's approach had been drowned in the drone of the wind. He stood staring at the girl, who sprang to her feet, wheeled and faced him, a glory of waist-length rippling dark hair falling round her flushed face.

Shocked into speechlessness she looked at him, cheeks flaming, eyes wide with apprehension. She was incredibly lovely with the rose in her cheeks, eyes brilliant, the wealth of hair rippling in the wind.

"My God! A girl!" Bob's voice was strangled, choked with amazement. "You told me your name was Harry!" he said accusingly, but with a wonderful light in his fine eyes.

"I said they called me Harry," she denied tremulously, "but my name is Harriet."

"YOU little fraud," he rejoined, but there was something tingling, something electric in his voice. His eyes glowed as he watched her.

With unsteady hands she divided her hair, plaited it in two silken braids, wound them around her head, adjusted the big parka hood. Neither spoke until that task was completed. Then: "But a girl on the winter trail alone! Harry, Harriet," he amended, "how does it happen?"

"Listen Bob, I'll tell you all about it—"

He listened silently, though occasionally his hands clenched, and his fine face darkened.

"This man is the enemy you spoke of yesterday?"

"Yes," she said in a small voice.

"And you love this Dan?"

Her eyes flamed, she opened her lips, but as he turned abruptly, closed them without speaking.

"I'm going back for my deer. Was so anxious to tell you I got one, I didn't wait to bring him in. We'll have a broiled steak for breakfast."

He smiled at her, but it was a wintry little smile. The pain at his heart was reflected in his face.

"Don't worry about a thing, Harriet. It shall make no difference. I hope it isn't necessary to tell you you are safe—with me. The only difference it shall make is, I'll take better care of you, now I know that my little comrade is—a girl."

His voice softened and his eyes were very gentle as he looked at her.

"Thanks, Bob," she said quietly.

As he went up the hill he turned, saw her standing straight, slim as a young Diana, watching him. He waved a fur-mittened hand, reached the crest of the hill, and disappeared down its side.

FOR a time he traveled slowly toward the spot where he had left the slain deer. Gradually his steps slowed until he halted. A log lay near by. He sat down, eyes unseeing, mind in a tumult.

"No wonder I was so drawn to her. I loved her from the moment I looked into her beautiful magnetic eyes. What a pal she is! What a sweetheart and wife she would make. How I love her—and she loves that Dan—"

Meditating thus, he paid no attention to the lapse of time. Did not see the gray dawn grow clearer. It was the sunrise hour, although the sun was not visible. A gray fog-like atmosphere was enveloping the earth, forerunner of a blizzard!

A scream sounded above the drone of the wind. Shrill and terrified, it rang over the snowy waste.

Bob sprang to his feet. Grasping the rifle he had laid beside him, he hurried to the top of the hill. When he reached its crest he saw a long line of magnificent dogs racing down the trail, a man swinging on the sled's stern-step, a long moose-hide whip lashing the running dogs.

Among the pack in the sled lay a long shape, a blanket wrapped around it. That much Bob's grim eyes could see; then the man, dogs and sled were lost in the distance.

Heart pounding, Bob flew to their camp.

"I took the rifle with me. She had no means of protection," he muttered grimly.

The snowy floor of their camp indicated that a struggle had taken place. It was trampled, rough. Harriet's dogs, frightened by the conflict, had fled to a safe distance and lay hidden behind clumps of snow-covered bush.

Bob whistled. One by one they came from their retreat, reassured by that whistle and the voice they had come to know. Swiftly, with steady hands he buckled them in their harness, threw the pack into the sled, his snowshoes on top, sprang on the sled's stern-step and uncoiled his whip.

"Mush," he called, "and faster than you've ever gone in your lives!"

THE sled on its long runners shot over the snow. Low to the ground the dogs ran, their heart in their work.

As they raced, Bob watched the snow, where clearly lay the imprints of the team and sled before him.

"If only the blizzard will hold off!" he prayed. Yet even at that moment he heard the far wailing of the storm winds. Soon the frozen forest would answer in a sullen grinding undertone. Then would come the snow and sleet riding on the wind!

But how long before it broke? How long before the precious directing imprints on the trail would be lost in snow? Bob set his teeth.

"I'll not give up the pursuit as long as a spark of life remains in my body," he said grimly.

But the dogs ahead of him were too fast for Harriet's slower team. With racing heart and staring eyes, Bob scanned the trail. No moving thing blurred its white surface.

Occasionally he groaned aloud as the picture of Harriet's terror and

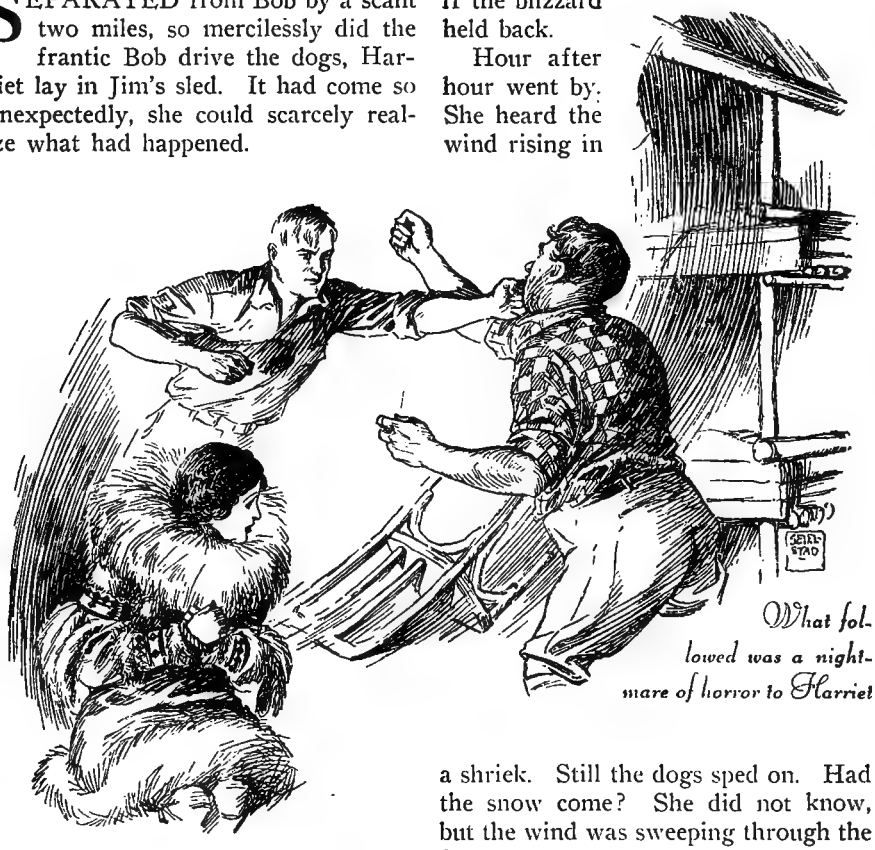
agony of soul flashed before his senses. "I was thoughtless. I never should have left her alone. But I never dreamed that man would overtake her so quickly. What a devil he must be—"

SEPARATED from Bob by a scant two miles, so mercilessly did the frantic Bob drive the dogs, Harriet lay in Jim's sled. It had come so unexpectedly, she could scarcely realize what had happened.

Here she lay half suffocated by that blanket, unable to move. Had Bob heard her scream? He must have gone a considerable distance. He had been away so long.

Would he follow? Undoubtedly he would. Their imprints would be clear if the blizzard held back.

Hour after hour went by. She heard the wind rising in a shriek. Still the dogs sped on. Had the snow come? She did not know, but the wind was sweeping through the forest in gale-like volume.



What followed was a nightmare of horror to Harriet

Bending over the fire cooking the meal cakes, the girl had suddenly heard a crunch on the snow behind her. She had wheeled, caught a glimpse of Jim's triumphant face. As she screamed a blanket went over her head. Furiously she had fought, but a rope had been wound around her, pinioning her arms to her sides.

Surely the pace was lessening? The dogs were growing tired. Jim must have driven them with but scant periods of rest, so quickly had he overtaken her.

Oh, the cruel savage triumph that was on his face when her startled eyes had seen him!

How her body ached, held so long

in that bound position! She rolled against the side of the long sled as it whirled around a curve. She felt the bump as it drew slowly to a stop.

Where were they? They had left the trail. Was Jim stopping for camp? Had the dogs, powerful though they were, at last given out? Had the snow come? Oh! God, had the snow come?

She heard Jim shout to his team. Felt herself lifted, heard a door crash in, felt herself placed in a chair. In a moment the rope was loosened, the blanket whisked from her body. Yet before she could move, so cramped were her muscles, a thong was tightened around her wrists, another bound her ankles.

She stared around, wildness in her eyes. She was in a cabin. Cold though the place was, there were unmistakable signs that it was a home for some one. It was fully furnished.

Swiftly Harriet's eyes sought the window. The panes were too frosted to see outside.

"I got to tend to my dogs," Jim said. "Then I'll be back an' you an' I will have a talk."

With burning eyes, she watched him open the door, stared beyond into a cloud of falling snow!

A sob rose in her throat. The wind caught at the door, shook it as though determined to tear it from its hinges. With difficulty Jim closed it behind him.

Harriet tasted the bitter brine of tears as they ran down her cheeks onto her lips.

Snow! Bob could not trace her now!

AFTER a time the door opened and Jim came stamping in, shaking great clinging flakes from his parka.

"Good thing I noticed this cabin yesterday. In fact, no cabin escaped me. I looked for you in every shelter I could find off the trail. Thought you might have taken to cover."

He paused as he drew his parka over his head. Free of it, he went on: "Did you think you could get away from Jim Stoleman, you little fool? Ain't I told you what Jim wants he—gets?" He spat contemptuously.

"This looks like a trapper's cabin," he continued, ignoring Harriet's silence. "An' the folks are away. So much the better. We'll stop here until the blizzard is over."

He turned to the ash-strewn hearth. Selected wood from a pile that stood at the end of the hearth. Kindled a fire. When it was blazing to his satisfaction, he turned and looked down at Harriet.

"I'm goin' to keep you tied till you promise me—an' I know you ain't the kind to break your promise—that you won't try to get away. You might be fool enough to try to run off with my dogs an' sled, even in the storm, when my back's turned. You act decent to me an' I'll act decent to you. I'll take you back home an' we'll be married proper. But you act contrary with me an' I'll—" his face revealed the threat he left unsaid.

Time, she must have time, Harriet thought desperately. Steadying her voice she answered: "I don't know yet. I'll promise nothing. There's no hurry, is there?"

Jim laughed. "By heaven, you're the girl for me," he exploded. "All right, take your time, an' as I'm hungry I'm goin' to rustle some feed."

He strode to the store-room built onto the cabin. From shelves and bins he procured what he wanted, and proceeded to prepare a meal.

"Not so bad, hey, Harry?" he quer-

ied. "Nice warm cabin an' a well stocked one. Better than being out on the trail."

He paused a moment as he mixed flour for biscuits.

"Where was you goin'? Headed for Port Albany?" he grunted with a sidelong look at the white-faced silent girl.

But she did not hear him. She was listening to the savage onslaughts of icy wind, to the long fierce howl of a wolf pack. A terrible day to be alone on the trail. Was Bob—

But perhaps he had not followed her, after all. He was due now at Port Albany to take over his duties—

JIM was slow in preparing the meal, for a great part of the time was spent in staring at Harriet. Where was her old-time spirit, her dauntlessness? She drooped in the chair, head sunk on her breast.

The gloom grew so heavy, Jim lit a candle when he finally set his cooked meal on the table.

"Hungry?" he inquired.

"No." She shot a contemptuous glance at him.

Leisurely he ate. Leisurely filled his pipe. His smoke finished, he walked to Harriet, bent over her.

"Almost time for a kiss, my girl," he said.

She raised her bound hands, struck savagely at the sinister face. Her eyes fell on the cabin door. Was she going mad under this terrible suspense—or had the door opened a mere crack? Was it opening farther? Was that a pair of grim blue eyes under a snow-laden parka hood, staring at her?

"Where's that draft comin' from?" Jim demanded as he straightened.

The door crashed to, and he wheeled.

"Hands up! Back over to that chair! Sit down!" came Bob's voice, yet so steel-like in quality, Harriet scarcely recognized it.

Cursing, Jim backed to the chair, fell into it heavily. He eyed the rifle in the newcomer's hands.

"Thanks for the light," said Bob coolly. "If that candle hadn't been near the window I'd have gone on. I saw it flickering from the trail. Thought I'd stop and make inquiry."

He dared not remove his eyes from the scowling man opposite him. Yet he was conscious of Harriet's little gasp. Heard the low cry: "Oh, you came—you came!"

"Who the —— are you?" Jim rasped, his hands still raised over his head.

"I'm the man who is going to thrash you within an inch of your life. That's enough for you to know." Bob's voice fell with a deadly finality.

FOR a few seconds the silence was intense. Then: "I've never killed a man. My business is to save life, not to destroy it. I'll give you a chance to fight for your despicable life—on one condition. Refuse that condition and I'll shoot you where you sit. I think any jury would acquit me—under the circumstances."

Bob paused, then continued. "You are guilty of abduction. And the penalty is life imprisonment. You know that, of course?"

"What's your condition?" Jim growled.

"That we'll fight with our fists, not knives. After I whip you, you are to leave this cabin with your dogs and sled and take the trail. It's a bad day, but an old trailer like you can weather it."

He heard Harriet move in her chair, heard her startled exclamation.

Jim smiled. This seemed too good

to be true. He, with his bull-like strength, matched against that lean young fellow!

"I know you, Stoleman, and I've heard of you at the Post. You've a reputation for getting what you want, but I've heard your word is good. No man ever knew you to lie. Give me your word that you will go away—after I've licked you—and I'll take it."

"What's this girl to you?" Jim growled.

"I'm her friend."

Jim shot a swift glance at Harriet. She was leaning forward, two bright splashes of red in her cheeks. Her eyes were burning as though with an inner fire.

"Fair fight, S t o l e m a n!" Bob warned.

"Fair fight, I'll take you."

Bob lowered his rifle, pulled off his parka. He knew Jim's reputation, Jim's word was binding.

"Untie me, Bob," Harriet begged.

"No, she might help you. She stays tied till one or the other of us is licked," Jim stipulated.

Bob nodded. "I'll untie you soon, Harry," he said, "don't worry." For a few seconds they gazed deep in each other's eyes, then Bob stepped back.

"Ready, go!" he cried.

Instantly, Jim struck out for Bob's jaw, all his powerful strength in the blow.

What followed was a nightmare of horror to Harriet.

BOB'S cool brain told him that here was no small antagonist. But it was bull-like strength; no skill, no knowledge of boxing was Jim's. His ability to take punishment was astonishing. Bob sent blows crashing against the man's face. But Jim came back for more.

Bob recognized the man's strength. He knew that if he came to close grips he was lost. He fought warily, so that every blow landed. Yet Jim seemed impervious to pain, and Bob was tiring.

Harriet watched with burning eyes. Her breath came in short, hard panting gasps.

With a bellow of rage, Jim rushed in. Bob was quick, but not quick enough. He sidestepped. Quickly Jim swung around, caught Bob a ferocious blow in the middle of the chest. Bob staggered a moment, shot backward, crumpled to the floor.

But in falling, his foot went out, and Jim, backing away, tripped over it. He came down heavily.

"Bob, Bob!" Harriet screamed.

That horror-filled scream brought him upright. He was fighting for Harriet; fighting to free her from this beast. And when freed, she would marry the man she loved—Dan. Nevertheless he was fighting for her—for her happiness.

Desperately, with all his strength, Bob struck out. The squirming, struggling Jim could not throw off that tenacious body, could not check that rain of blows.

Finally Jim Stoleman raised his hand in token of surrender.

"Had enough?" Bob panted.

"You win," Jim gasped, for he could stand no more punishment.

On shaking legs Bob rose, walked unsteadily to Harriet. He seized a knife lying on the table and cut her thongs. For a moment she lay back in her chair, limp from the terrific strain.

Jim got to his feet, stood breathing heavily. Then he grasped his parka, pulled it over his swollen and bruised face. He did not look at Harriet. Silently he turned to the door. Within

a few moments they heard his "mush" call to his dogs.

BOB looked at Harriet, a boyish smile on his bleeding face. "Primitive stuff, Harry, but it had to be. I knew—if I won—you would be rid of the man for good."

Harriet tore off her parka, caught up a basin, filled it with warm water from the kettle on the hearth. With gentle hands she bathed his cut face, his bleeding fists.

Bob lay back in the chair silently, for Harriet was very quiet. Often she looked at him with eager questioning eyes that he did not see.

When she had finished, she warmed food that stood on the table and made hot fresh tea.

"The dogs," Bob said finally, still avoiding her eyes.

"I'll attend to them. Lie down on the bunk and rest," she urged, her voice unsteady.

He walked to the bunk, stretched out wearily. Exhausted nature claimed her reckoning, and Bob slept. One hour, two hours—

He was awakened by the sound of voices. "An' we knew the blizzard was comin', so we hurried home. Thought we'd get back before it broke. Mighty glad to find the cabin warm and company waitin' for us," a hearty cordial voice boomed.

"The young man is your husband?" Bob heard a woman's voice inquire.

Then he listened quietly while in broken, halting sentences, Harriet told the whole story. Amid little exclamations of sympathy from the woman, the man burst out: "The dog—got what he deserved!"

"Well, it's all right, little girl," the woman said comfortingly. "You and he will stay here until the storm is over —we got three rooms. Then we'll all go on to Port Albany together. We was agoin' a little later to take our pelts—but we can go now just as well."

"Oh, will you? How splendid!" Harriet exclaimed.

Bob sat up. "Hello, folks!" he said, "I've been lying here listening to your conversation—"

"BOB!" Harriet breathed, rushing toward him. Then she stopped and with brilliant eyes and glowing cheeks looked at the young doctor.

There was something in Harriet's eyes, something as old as the world itself, yet ever new, that brought Bob to his feet. Incredulously he returned her gaze. Harriet took a step forward, then yielded breathlessly to the pressure of his arms. Arms that tightened, held her hungrily. Still he did not seek her lips.

"But I thought you loved Dan," he said at last. "Oh, darling, darling—" his voice broke.

"It was only infatuation. I knew it long ago. It—it hurt at first but—" Her arms gripped him strongly. "Oh, Bob, I love *you!* Don't you know it?"

"Precious," he crooned. "And I've loved you from the first hour we met, my little pal, my sweetheart."

Now his lips fastened hungrily on hers. They stood, oblivious of the two intensely interested people watching them—oblivious of all the world.

"And when we reach Port Albany there'll be a wedding first thing!"

They drew apart, glowing, laughing softly.

"We forgot you were here," Harriet murmured softly.

"Sure you did. There was only you two in the world. That's love," the woman said gently, her eyes shining.

"Some day, Lucy Knight, you'll fall for a man— and I hope you fall hard!"

Just a Little Clown

It was hurt pride that made her laugh at life so that no one should know—And then life showed her a bright and shining vision of love

By Mary Strother Chambers

Author of "Crisis," etc.

THE Russian River is cool and green. It runs through shady, verdant cañons and in places its current is unexpectedly swift. Around this curve one hears suddenly the roar of half-hidden falls and around that turn there is a stretch of nasty rapids.

But in between these rough spots are long stretches of slow-moving emerald water, bordered by sunny white beaches, meccas for thousands of bathers during the hot summer months.

Upon one of these sunny little beaches, browning to an exceedingly nice turn, lay, one afternoon, a trio of maidens. Prone on the hot sand they lay, and their bare backs, above the bright trunks that comprised a good two-thirds of their bathing suits, were being well sun-kissed.

Now and then one of them would sit up, wipe the perspiration from her brow, adjust a negligible shoulder strap so that, by no chance, should a streak of light skin remain upon her upper torso, and plop down on her face again. Decidedly, this group had adopted the Suntan mode.

A frowzy-haired, small creature suddenly sat upright on her gaudy bathing towel.

"Whew!" she said. "This heat is getting me. I feel like a well-done lamb chop. How about another swim?"

The red-haired nymph beside her rolled over lazily.

"You're too energetic for this company, Lucy," she complained. "Save your pep for to-night. What's the use of getting exhausted now, when there's a masquerade ball in the offing?"

Lucy Knight shrugged and rubbed some sand from a moist shoulder.

"Huh! What's a masquerade but a regular Saturday night dance in hired clothes?" she demanded. "Nothing to get burned up about. Hand me my glasses, will you, Allison? This glare is torture."

She blinked at her chum near-sightedly.

"You're a queer woman, Lucy," said the other girl, whom nature had started out in life as a pink and white blonde, but who was now a cross between a Saint Cecilia and a red Indian. "Don't you really care about dances and pretty clothes and men? Or is your scornful manner just a pose?"

LUCY adjusted her spectacles and regarded the tumbled curls and starry blue eyes of her interrogator thoughtfully. For just the fraction of a second a revealing little droop appeared on her unrouged mouth. But it was gone almost immediately and the old, devil-may-care grin was back.

"Huh! Why get all hot and bothered about clothes or dances, or *men?*" The emphasis on the last word was scathing. "Such preoccupations are positively pre-war."

"Yeah?" drawled the blond girl. "I suppose, then, you won't be at the costume ball to-night?"

"Well," demanded Lucy, "what sort of costume would you suggest that I wear? With hair like this"—she ran her fingers through her kinky brown mop until each unmanageable strand stood on end—"and with a nose like this"—she poked the offending member disparagingly—"just what would you suggest? The costume of a Hottentot?"

Allison Teale looked up interestedly. "You'd be a knock-out as a Hottentot, honestly, Luc," she said. "With their less-than-nothing dress and with your figure—"

"Huh!" jeered Lucy. "Who ever heard of a Hottentot with shell-rimmed glasses?"

"You don't need to wear your glasses."

"No? What do you want me to do, darling? Bump into every one on the floor who isn't equipped with a hundred watt tail-light? Thanks for your kindly interest, Allison, dear. But I gave myself up as hopeless long ago. You might as well do the same."

"Do you mean to say," asked Allison slowly, "that you aren't going to the masquerade, Lucy?"

"Sure, I'm going. I'm on the entertainment committee."

"WHOOPS!" said the blond girl. "Then the party will be good. When Lucy Knight is on the entertainment committee of a dance, that's a dance I'd break a couple of legs to attend."

"Yeah, and what fun would you have then?" queried Lucy, as she began to gather up her things—red bathing shoes, that were never meant to go with her yellow suit, a rumpled, faded green coolie coat, a brown

swimming cap which she perched carelessly atop her tousled hair.

"Coming up, Allison?" she asked.

"Wait a minute," said her chum, sitting up indolently and searching around in the folds of her bathing towel for a compact.

"Say, Allison," asked the blond girl as she pulled slippers of a heavenly blue onto her shapely feet, "have you seen the new man who arrived next door to you this morning?"

"Timothy Graydon, you mean?" inquired Allison, her green eyes resting on the other speculatively.

"Yes. Have you seen him, Lucy?"

"No. Why should I?"

"Well, when you do see him you'll know why. He's visting the Longs. And he's the best-looking male that has hit Rio Verde for many moons."

"Interested in him, Blondy?" asked Allison carelessly. "Because if you are, you'd better get out your battle armor. I saw Barbara Knight talking to him this morning, and you'll notice that Barbara is not among those present on the beach this afternoon."

LUCY looked up with sudden interest. "H-m, I've heard sis mention Tim Graydon. She met him at a frat dance last year. Raved about him, too."

The blond girl sighed resignedly. "Well, I'm through, then, before I start. When Barbara Knight wants a man, she gets him. The rest of us are left gasping by the roadside."

"Well," said Lucy with annoying complacency, "if I do say it as shouldn't, my big sister is the goods. Pure gold lamé and fifty inches wide, if you get my meaning."

The blond girl started to comment, but Allison Teale interrupted her.

"The nicest thing about Barbara," she asserted loyally, "is the admiration she inspires in Lucy. Most little sisters of a girl like Barbara would be catty, not adoring."

"Barbara happens to be a peach," said Lucy. "Come on, you two. It must be five o'clock. That gives you only four hours to dress for the masquerade. I guess you'll just have to forego your dinners."

"Some day, Lucy Knight," said the blond girl coldly, "you'll fall for a man—and I hope you fall hard. Then perhaps you'll appreciate the importance of a masquerade ball. You'll realize that it gives you a chance to be more exotic and gorgeous than anything else in our fashion-bound existence. And, believe me, you'll grab that chance with both hands."

"Pooh!" scoffed Lucy. "If I ever fall for a man—*if*, I said—he won't be the kind I'll have to doll up for. He'll be a man who won't give a darn whether I'm knock-kneed or cock-eyed, or what. If he isn't, I won't fall for him."

"He'd have to be," said the blonde, under her breath, but not unkindly.

LUCY didn't hear her. That young lady had started up from the beach and had discovered that the wireless fence posts along the path made simply swell hurdles. She was endeavoring to break her neck by leapfrogging over them.

Allison Teale, with a patient grin, began to gather up the belongings her chum scattered indiscriminately behind her.

Thus it was that Lucy Knight, breathless, red-faced and fiendishly disheveled, eventually made her appearance on the front porch of the summer cottage where her sister Barbara was entertaining Timothy Graydon.

Barbara Knight was like white moonlight on a black sea. She was like a red snow-flower pushing its way through virginal drifts. Her skin was pale ivory, her hair polished ebony and her lips were carved rubies come alive. Her eyes were molten darkness flecked with starlight. In a world of bronzed, made-to-a-pattern women, she was like a glowing pearl among multi-colored beads.

"Lucy!" Barbara exclaimed in a scandalized tone as her sister gained the top of the steps. "How did you ever get into such a mess?"

Lucy surveyed her own small person curiously. "Am I your definition of a mess?" she queried.

Barbara laughed affectionately. "I just wanted Mr. Graydon to realize that you don't always look as you do now," she said. "Come over here and be introduced. Tim, this is my little sister, Lucy."

LITTLE sister Lucy looked up, a trifle belligerently, at Timothy Graydon. That much lauded young man accorded her a genial smile.

"Hello, there!" he said. "I've been hearing about you. From all reports, Rio Verde would be a very dead place indeed if you weren't here to shoot a little adrenalin into its sluggish veins."

To her everlasting horror, Lucy found her gaze dropping shyly before the laugh in this most personable man's blue eyes. She fumbled for words like the veriest schoolgirl.

"Yeah," she managed at last, somewhat gruffly. "I'm the original hypodermic. I use whoopee brand needles. Who's been maligning me to you, anyhow?"

Tim Graydon laughed and Lucy watched the cleft in his chin deepen as he did so. Then, shocked by such a display of feminine susceptibility, she turned abruptly away.

"I've got to change my suit," she muttered before he could answer her question. "I feel like a combination sandbank and Turkish bath. Excuse me."

Lucy fled to her room, her cheeks hot with shame and anger, and with a new, strange excitement to which she refused to put a name.

She flung her bathing suit into a corner, viciously, and stepped under a stinging shower. She rejoiced grimly in the icy needles that beat her streaked brown and white body to a mottled crimson.

"Fool!" she berated herself violently. "Ass! Moron! To let the smile in a man's eyes embarrass you! To be fascinated like a dumb sub-deb by the dimple in a man's chin! To even look twice at a man who has a dimple in his chin!"

SHE rubbed her body furiously with a coarse towel, then stepped into a filmy bit of negligee. Catching a glimpse of herself in a long mirror, she paused suddenly, gazing at her reflection. Allison Teale's words flashed through her mind: "You'd be a knockout as a Hottentot, Luc. With your figure—"

Lucy stared for a moment. It was a lovely figure, really. Small and delicately shaped. She went closer to the mirror, peered into it wistfully for a long time.

"Is my figure my only good feature?" she asked aloud.

She patted her brown hair with hands grown oddly anxious. As soon as the hands released their pressure the rebellious hair sprang back into its customary unruly mass.

"Nothing I can do about that," she said mournfully.

She examined her pert face carefully, feature by feature. Her mouth, not so bad, but a turned-up nose was a turned-up nose; nothing but the most drastic surgery could make it anything else.

Her eyes—well, without her glasses they did look big and soft. But then, so did most girls' eyes. Dreamy eyes were no especial asset, unless you had other good points to go with them, Lucy thought.

She shut one of the said eyes and surveyed her long, curling lashes critically, ran the tip of her little finger under them, felt how luxuriantly they grew.

"They really are swell!" she murmured. "But, heck! what help are they, squashed in behind my specs?"

TURNING from the mirror in disgust, she rummaged in a bureau drawer for clean underclothes. A tailored brassiere, a pair of striped shorts.

She put them on, slipped into flexible, low-heeled sandals and flung one of the linen tennis dresses she always wore over her head.

A vigorous brushing with a military hairbrush, which made no impression upon her springy mop, an inexpert dab at her nose with an entirely wrong shade of powder, and she was dressed.

Again she stared at herself in the mirror. She gave a faint sigh.

"Might as well surrender the ghost, Lucy," she counseled tartly. "Court jesters were bred from the likes of you."

She walked slowly out to the porch. In the doorway she paused.

Barbara was sitting there alone; her classic head, with its soft knot of dusky hair coiled low on her white neck, was bent over a magazine of love stories.

Lucy considered a moment, then tiptoed into her sister's bedroom.

When next she appeared there was an unwonted shyness in her manner.

"Bobs," she said softly, clearing her throat. "Bobs, what—what are you going to wear to-night?"

Her sister looked up lazily. Then her limpid eyes grew wide with amazement.

"My heavens, Luc!" she exclaimed. "What under the sun have you been doing?"

Lucy wriggled a little. "Oh, just experimenting a bit—practicing on my make-up for to-night. What's the matter, Bobs? Isn't it all right?"

Barbara surveyed her with unconcealed disapproval.

"Right!" she said. "Have you forgotten you have a neck? Deliver me from women who powder their faces and forget their necks! And that rouge—you look as if you had a fever. And lip stick, contrary to the general opinion, should never be left as it comes from the stick, my dear."

Her voice softened.

"Want me to fix you up, Luc? I think you'd look quite sweet really, with the proper make-up. Particularly if you'd let your hair grow out a little and would take off your glasses."

"I abhor hair crawling down the back of my neck," said Lucy brusquely. "And you know yourself that I can't see four feet ahead of me without my glasses."

"Well, all right," said Barbara crossly. "Do as you please. But if you won't let me make you up, for Heaven's sake go wash your face. You look like a caricature."

Lucy obediently went inside. And for the first time in her life the tears

of wounded vanity mingled with the soapsuds on her wash cloth.

THE masquerade ball was held in the Rio Verde dance hall. The big pavilion had been converted into a room out of the Arabian Nights. Gorgeous-hued hangings, glistening with gold and silver and tiny, sparkling mirrors, swung from the darkened balcony to the floor. The ceiling was a cloud of rosy silk, behind which artfully concealed lights glowed like the last pale streaks of sunset.

The costumes on the dance floor successfully completed the illusion of an Arabian Nights entertainment.

Rich velvets, gleaming satins, flashing jewels and nodding plumes bore mute testimony to the fact that the San Francisco costumers and the United States mails had done a rushing business.

The first dance had ended and couples were seeking the padded benches scattered around the walls, when the sound of an old Italian air drifted in through the open door.

Then the hangings over the doorway were pushed aside and a tall, stoop-shouldered Italian stepped apologetically within.

His clothes were shabby and ill-matched. A soft felt hat was crushed down over his face. A black mask hid his eyes and his mouth was covered by long, flowing mustaches. He stood there, hesitantly, and finished the tune he had been playing on a battered old accordion.

There was a smattering of applause. Before it had died away, the Italian struck up a livelier air and tugged at a rope attached to one wrist.

A small, furry brown paw was thrust through the hangings. An unsmiling, ludicrous face followed it. Behind the grotesque mask, two harried brown eyes darted quick glances around the room.

Seemingly reassured by the attentive silence, the small creature sidled slowly in. Its monkey costume was exceedingly well executed. The outfit was natural and complete, even to the long brown tail, which waved slowly as its owner came a step or two forward.

THE Italian uttered a guttural command, opened wide the stops on his instrument. The monkey danced a few awkward steps, mournfully, unwillingly, as monkeys always dance. Something about the tiny dancing figure took all hearts.

After bowing jerkily to the audience, it produced a tiny pipe from its velvet jacket and pretended to smoke it for a few short puffs. It capered again, paused and scratched its ribs diligently.

The crowd roared. The Italian held out a dented tin cup and untied the rope from the monkey's waist. The monkey seized the cup, looked hopefully within, then scampered through the crowd, holding out the cup and chattering shrilly.

The audience broke into unstinted applause. The Italian bowed and scraped. The monkey jumped up and down delightedly.

Finally, when the applause threatened to become a nuisance, the orchestra swung into the second dance. The Italian set his accordion behind a bench and solemnly stepped out on the floor with the monkey in his arms.

His lips were close to the furry brown ear.

"That's Allison, isn't it?" he asked. "In the Cleopatra outfit? No one else has red hair like that."

The monkey nodded. "Yes," said

Lucy's voice, "but I'm not suppose to tell you, Jack."

The Italian laughed. "As though I could mistake her. Say, isn't she a knock-out? That hair of hers, and her tanned skin and that siren's outfit? If she doesn't win first prize, I'll eat it."

Lucy giggled. "First prize is a portable phonograph and a book of records, Jack. Better buy your sodium bicarb now."

THE dance over, Jack Saunders led the way to a laughing group, of which the radiant Cleopatra was a part. Hilarious congratulations greeted the Italian and his trained monkey. A willowy Scheherazade in sapphire robes put her white, jewel-bedecked arm around Lucy.

"A peach of a stunt, sis," she said in a low voice.

The eyes behind the grotesque mask twinkled. "My make-up this evening wasn't so incongruous after all, was it?"

Scheherazade's dark eyes were thoughtful. "You don't need a make-up with that rig," she said. "What was the idea?"

The monkey shrugged a furry shoulder and turned hastily away. That remark about the make-up hadn't been so bright. A few more breaks like that and she'd give herself away to Barbara, if she hadn't already.

An approving masculine voice said: "That was one of the cleverest acts I've seen in a long time."

No need for Lucy to glance at the cleft-chinned pirate who towered above her to place that voice. It was Tim Graydon's.

The warm, palpitating little form within the monkey suit turned strangely cold, then hot again.

"We—we aim to please," said Lucy.

The orchestra began to play once more. Lucy stood motionless, glad her face was covered by a mask. She felt so oddly self-conscious.

Would Tim Graydon ask her to dance? Would he choose her in preference to one of the more attractively clad girls who stood near him?

Tim Graydon wouldn't. She saw him hold out his arms to Barbara, saw

There was something about the tiny dancing figure that took all hearts

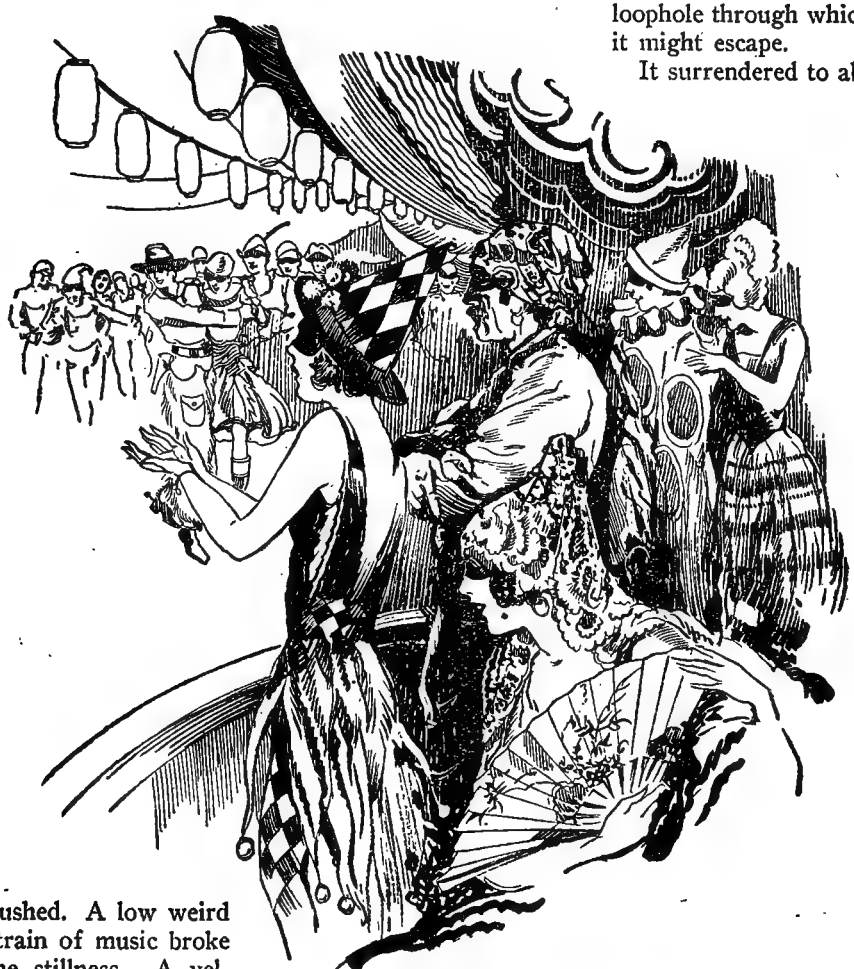
her sister's perfect lips curve in a beguiling smile as she assented.

Swiftly the group around Lucy dissolved into couples, disappeared into the waltzing throng. The little monkey was left alone and for the first time in her twenty-two years Lucy Knight felt the taste of ashes in her mouth.

WHEN the evening was half over, the drummer beat a tattoo on his drum and the orchestra leader rose to make an announcement:

"The next number will be a specialty dance, by the chairman of our entertainment committee, Miss Lucy Knight."

A smattering of applause broke out, but as the lights dimmed, it was hushed. A low weird strain of music broke the stillness. A yellow spot-light picked out a small brown figure crouched in a heap in the center of the floor.



The orchestra began a strange, haunting melody. The monkey rose hesitantly, stared fearfully about.

Then, fully awakened, it clutched the imaginary bars of its imaginary cage. It gazed through them mournfully, its brown eyes shining and wet. It shook them futilely.

It loped about the cage frantically, seeking in this corner and that for a loophole through which it might escape.

It surrendered to abject despair, crouched down in a corner, wound its long arms around its head and mourned.

Applause.

The music quickened. The monkey rose again, its frenzy more acute. It shook the bars of its cage in rage. It

grimaced wildly, tore out handfuls of its brown fur. It beat its chest.

It shook the bars again and one could almost hear the shrieks of rage that seemed to rise from its hairy throat.

Then suddenly its straining hands seemed to find a loosened bar. The monkey braced its feet and tugged frantically at the bar with both arms. It wrenched and pulled and fought and at last the bar came loose. The palpitating creature crept dazedly out of the cage.

THE crescendo of the music rose. The monkey, free and unhampered, took a few hesitating steps, as though testing this incredible new liberty. It looked about cautiously, became reassured.

It danced more spontaneously, and its grimaces became indicative of joy.

The violins swung into a high, lilting strain. The steady thump of the drums became the beat of the tom-toms in the jungle.

The monkey broke into a dance of the wildest ecstasy. It leaped madly about. It seemed to laugh aloud.

Then, with one last, wide-flung gesture of its hairy arms, it darted away —back to the shelter of its beloved jungle.

Minutes of applause brought no encore. The little monkey, it seemed, was taking no chances of being returned to captivity.

And Lucy Knight had done her share of the evening's entertainment. Even before the applause had died, she was on her way to the cottage.

In her quiet, chaste room she crawled wearily out of the monkey suit, cooled her perspiring body under the shower. With a fresh linen dress halfway over her head, she paused, then slipped the dress off and hung it back in the closet.

What was the use of returning to the dance? Allison and Jack Saunders, Barbara and Tim Graydon, a dozen other girls and men she could name, all absorbed in one another.

Where did she fit in? On the entertainment committee, that was all. Well, she'd done her entertaining. For the night, at least, Lucy was through. They could get some one else to clown for them.

LUCY was sprawled face downward in the hammock the next morning, industriously doing nothing, when she heard Tim Graydon's voice around the corner of the porch.

"Where is Lucy, Barbara? I want to compliment her on that dance last night. She's a riot, do you know that?"

Lucy sat up abruptly and jerked her short skirt into closer proximity to her bare knees.

"Of course, I know it," came in Barbara's sweet drawl. "We have lived together for quite some time."

Tim Graydon chuckled.

"It must be a regular circus living with Lucy," he commented. "Where is she?"

"In the hammock," responded Barbara. "Go on around."

Lucy's hands flew to her hair, patted it inadeptly and uselessly. She was considering a dash into the house for her powder puff when Graydon made his appearance.

"Oh, here you are!" he said easily. "Where did you disappear to last night? What's the idea of leaving without giving a fellow a chance to dance with you? Particularly after you revealed what a keen dancer you are?"

Lucy felt her cheeks growing hot. He had intended to dance with her, after all. The knowledge nearly made her tongue-tied.

"Didn't disappear," she finally responded crisply. "I was hot and tired. Those monkey clothes would make a good polar outfit. I came home to change and my bed looked better to me than the dance hall. So I climbed into it."

Graydon regarded her for a moment without speaking. Lucy found herself thinking alien and disturbing thoughts. How crisp and golden his hair was, for instance. How stalwart his shoulders, how graceful his carriage. How blue his eyes and how attractive his firm, young mouth that seemed always to be on the verge of laughter.

"You're a queer girl," Graydon said suddenly. "Most girls, after they had covered themselves with glory as you did, would be right on hand to receive the plaudits of the multitude. But you toss the said plaudits nonchalantly aside and, quitting the scene of your triumph, do the most prosaic thing imaginable—go to bed. What makes you like that?"

LUCY had had a heavy ache in the region of her heart for more than eighteen hours, and she was weary with trying to combat it. There was an oddly sympathetic expression in Tim Graydon's eyes as he waited for her to answer his question. The impulse swept over her to confess to him how sick of her rôle of clown she was. She actually opened her lips to pour it all out, then caught herself and shut her mouth stubbornly.

"Nothing makes me like that," she said at last. "I was tired, that's all."

Tim Graydon's eyes had grown unwontedly sober, though the trace of a smile was still on his lips as he said: "Come now, Lucy. You can't fool the doctor, you know."

Lucy stared at him. "Are you—a doctor?" she demanded incredulously.

Graydon grinned. "Not a full-fledged one, as yet. But I'm studying for my Ph. D. in psychology."

"Well, then," said Lucy defiantly, "suppose you tell me how I get this way?"

"I'd rather you told me," said Graydon, very gently. "Why did you run away last night, Lucy?"

"Because," said Lucy bitterly, "I'm tired of being a clown."

"You're a very appealing clown," said Graydon earnestly.

"Appealing? Me? With this face and hair and specs two inches thick?"

Graydon shrugged. "Well, we'll waive that point. Why did you suddenly decide you were tired of being a clown?"

LUCY did not answer for a moment. Why, she was asking herself, had she let Tim Graydon cajole her into this intimate conversation? She had no desire to expose her secret bitternesses to him.

She glanced up at him, a sharp retort on her lips, but the interested, friendly expression on his face made her pause.

Oh, well, she'd gone this far. She might as well do the job up right.

"Well," she said, her voice trembling in spite of herself, "after Jack Saunders and I did our little stunt, everybody was full of praise. The fellows as well as the girls. But—nobody asked me to dance, Tim. Not all the time I was there. The boys didn't want to dance with a gamin in a make-believe monkey skin. They

don't want a low-comedy clown for their girl friend. They want lovely girls like Allison and Barbara, girls full of the good old appeal."

"But," objected Graydon, "I've heard you are a man-hater."

"Well, why shouldn't I be? Men don't like me. They never pay any attention to me, except when I make 'em laugh."

"How long have you been so bitter about this, Lucy?" the man asked, his steady eyes on hers.

"Oh," said the girl tremulously, "I didn't use to care. But lately—" she broke off, flushed crimson.

"But lately," Graydon finished for her, "there is at least one man you don't hate. Is that it?"

Lucy was incapable of dissembling further. "That's it," she admitted helplessly.

As she saw him coming, Lucy assumed her pose

THOUGH Graydon's eyes were compassionate, his brisk manner was calculated to put the girl more at ease.

"Now that we've diagnosed the case," he said, "let's proceed to the cure."

Lucy looked up, startled. "The cure?" she gasped.

"Sure. You're struggling with an extremely well-developed inferiority complex."

Lucy's lips twisted into a scornful smile. "I really was beginning to think you knew your onions," she said. "But you now prattle about inferiority complexes! Pooh! Don't you know that they have been pushed clear through to China?"

Graydon smiled indulgently. "That's where you're wrong, Lucy. You think 'inferiority complex' is a quack phrase that doesn't mean anything. But it certainly does. It has become common mainly because so many people really have inferiority complexes."

"Oh, all right," Lucy admitted ungraciously. "What's your idea of a cure for my particular little I. C. then?"

"Well, as a first step, I suggest that you turn yourself over to Barbara's administrations. Do whatever she tells

you. I guarantee that you won't know yourself when you look into the mirror."

"If I follow Barbara's instructions," said Lucy, "I won't be able to see myself when I look into the mirror."

"Now there!" cried Graydon. "That's a case in point. What makes you think you're blind without those glasses of yours?"

"Oh, I'm not blind," said Lucy, "but I'm very uncomfortable. And the optician said—"

"I know what he said," interrupted Graydon. "Opticians believe in more and bigger glasses. But I know lots of women who are as near-sighted as you are and they never wear their glasses except in the privacy of their boudoirs. They have become accustomed to doing without them, that's all. You don't do any work that strains your eyes unduly, do you?"

"No," admitted Lucy.

"Well, then, try going without your glasses occasionally. Let the world see what nice eyes you have. Make the other girls envious of your lashes."

"Well, all right," Lucy conceded, though still a trifle truculently, "I'll take off my specs. I'll turn myself over to Barbara. Anything else?"

"Just be yourself. Only don't be so scornful. Forget you have a beautiful sister. And now about this man you've fallen for—"

LUCY was defenseless in the face of this sudden flank attack. "What about him?" she asked meekly.

"He's in Rio Verde, isn't he?"

"Uh-huh."

"And he doesn't know you're alive, figuratively speaking?"

"Well—you might put it that way." Graydon pondered a moment. "How about furnishing him with a little competition?"

"Yeah?" said Lucy. "Where will it come from, Mr. Wizard?"

Graydon looked a bit uncomfortable. "Well—how would I do for competition, Lucy? I'm not so high-powered, but I'd enjoy taking the job."

Lucy stared at him incredulously. Yes, he was in earnest; he wasn't making fun of her.

"Thanks," she murmured. "In view of the dearth of available material, I'll gladly accept your offer."

Graydon grinned boyishly. "Well, now, that's settled. Oh, yes, one thing I have to tell you. I'm up here recuperating from pneumonia, so I can't do anything very strenuous. I can't even dance much. That's why I didn't ask you to dance in the early part of last evening."

"O. K.," said Lucy, somewhat embarrassed. "I'll be the strenuous end of this hook-up. You just look on and applaud in the right places."

"Fine," said Tim, rising from his chair. "You let Barbara take a fling at you. I'll come back after lunch and we'll go swimming."

LUCY watched him saunter down the porch. Then she scraped her toe on the floor and studied it meditatively.

"He's not such a brilliant psychoanalyst as he thinks he is," she murmured, with a wry smile. "For which I, for one, am extremely grateful."

She sought out Barbara and made her request. That young lady stared at her with open-mouthed amazement.

"Of course I'll fix you up, Lucy. Haven't I always wanted to? However, I'd like to know what the idea is. You've always been so snooty about make-up. I'll bet it's a man."

Lucy shook her head vigorously. "Don't be a sap, Bobs."

Barbara eyed her suspiciously. "It's Tim Graydon, isn't it?"

Lucy managed a scornful laugh. "Huh! Fat chance I'd have if I were foolish enough to fall in love with him. Besides, he belongs to you."

Barbara shook her shining head. "Oh, no, he doesn't. Tim Graydon belongs very strictly to himself."

"Yes, but you have a crush on him, haven't you?"

"I did have one," said Barbara honestly. "But I have got over it. He's nice—but I don't know. He's not so hot. If you want him, sis, the field is clear, as far as I'm concerned."

"I don't want him," said Lucy flatly.

A RATHER self-conscious Lucy awaited Tim Graydon that afternoon. She was wearing a pair of Barbara's beach pyjamas, and they were the right shade of yellow to match her suit. Her sister had also outfitted her with yellow shoes and she swung a trim yellow bathing cap in one hand.

Barbara had done an almost professional job with Lucy's hair. It was softly finger-waved and the short, curly ends were gathered into a shell pin at the nape of her neck.

Rouge of exactly the proper shade tinted her tanned cheeks and her mouth, always an attractive feature, was reddened just enough to bring it the attention it deserved.

As Tim Graydon came up on the porch, Lucy assumed a stiff, unnatural attitude. She pursed her lips and let all semblance of expression slip from her face.

"What the modern girl will wear on the beach this summer," she announced. "Specially priced, for our big mid-July sale, at sixteen ninety-five."

Graydon grinned appreciatively. "You're a born mimic," he said, "and you remind me of a head on an old-fashioned medallion."

"These darn curls tickle my neck," complained Lucy.

"They tickle my sense of beauty," said Graydon.

Lucy regarded him with assumed truculence. "Don't hand out that line," she commanded. "I know how I look. I look swell—for Lucy Knight. But me and beauty are two separate elements. We don't mix."

"Have it your own way," said Graydon. "Come on, let's go down to the beach and let the gang pipe you off."

"The eminent doctor of psychology exhibits his latest human transformation," declaimed Lucy. "I'll give you an old photograph of me, Tim. Then we can have a little display advertising. Before and after the doctor got in his licks."

"You keep still about this business," ordered Graydon. "Want to spoil the whole thing?"

"Spoil what thing?"

"Why, the ensnaring of this elusive male, of course."

"Huh!" said Lucy. "I'm working on that much harder than you think. You'd be surprised."

"There!" said Tim complacently. "Didn't I tell you? Your sense of inferiority decreases in direct proportion to your pride in your appearance."

LUCY was not certain just what turned the trick, whether it was her improved appearance or the fact that she was receiving the attentions of a good-looking man.

Within a few days she was in as

much demand as Allison Teale and almost as popular as Barbara. She had plenty of masculine companions for swimming, hiking or dancing.

And the disgusting part of it was, she didn't want them. With Tim Graydon at her command, she didn't care if no other man ever cluttered up the landscape. But she forced herself to accept other attentions. She didn't consider it sporting to impose upon Tim's professional interest.

Tim certainly played his part well. He did not rush her too heavily, but just enough to make other men aware that he was more than casually interested in her.

Lucy soon discovered that curiosity is a masculine as well as a feminine trait. Other men were curious to learn what made her attractive to Tim Graydon. And in the course of learning they found out that Lucy Knight was exceedingly good company.

As others claimed Lucy's attentions, Tim Graydon slipped into the background. Not too far, for that would have been a fatal error. He was always there to impose his claims at just the right time.

When some one else seemed especially eager to take Lucy golfing, for instance, Tim asserted a prior claim, and bore her off. When another man was urgently requesting the next waltz, Tim maintained that it had been promised to him.

ONE night some one conceived the bright idea of canoeing up the river to a dance at another resort.

It was a clear, moonlight night and all of Lucy's crowd readily fell in with the suggestion. They rushed down to the boat landing and began picking out canoes and partners for the evening.

Lucy was trying to decide whether she would go with Allison's brother, Bill, or yield to the entreaties of the red-headed boy from Oregon. A firm voice interrupted the jesting arguments of the trio.

"Lucy is going with me," it said. "She promised this afternoon to go canoeing with me to-night."

Lucy had not seen Tim Graydon all afternoon. However—

"That's right," she said. "I did promise. I'm sorry, kids. I forgot I had a date."

Tim shoved a canoe into the water.

"In you go," he said. "Say, Lucy, could you manage all right if we should tip over? I don't like to take you out if you can't handle yourself. I'm still as weak as a rag after a few strokes in the water. I doubt if I could get you out if you needed help."

Lucy, who was certain she would drown if she had more than four feet of deep water to swim over, nodded casually.

"Sure I can handle myself. You needn't worry."

Anything to go canoeing in the moonlight with Tim.

"I'm not worrying. One chance in a hundred that we'll go over. But it has happened, you know."

THEY climbed into the canoe and Graydon shoved off from the beach. Lucy leaned against the back rest, sighing contentedly.

"Well, how's the campaign going?" Graydon asked at length. "Getting any results?"

Lucy hesitated. "Well, not any tangible ones, I'm afraid."

"What's the matter with this secret sorrow of yours? Is he just plain dumb?"

"Maybe he thinks I'm just dumb."

Tim groaned. "There you go! Just when I think you're well on the road to recovery, you have a relapse. And I'm beginning to think this man of yours is a dud, if you don't mind my being frank. First thing he knows, you won't be waiting around for him. Some other fellow will cut him out."

Lucy laughed, a trifle shakily. "What are you trying to do, Tim? Blow up my punctured self-assurance?"

"Is it punctured, Lucy?"

"Well, I'm far from a member of the Royal Mounted." There was an ill-concealed bitterness in Lucy's tone, and Tim flushed abruptly.

"If that dumb egg," he said with sudden heat, "has hurt your feelings, I'll find out who he is and knock his head off."

They were in a stretch of swift water, bucking the current, and Graydon plied his paddle with unwonted savagery. The blade caught under the stern of the canoe. Without further warning, the craft capsized and its two passengers were hurled into the water.

Lucy came up gasping and caught a glimpse of Tim's blond head gleaming in the moonlight.

"Can you make it?" he shouted.

Lucy swallowed some water. "O K," she called. "Pull for the shore."

Then she flung herself into the pressing business of getting ashore, too.

THE current was strong and Lucy had never before been in the water fully clad. Surprising, what a difference a few ounces of clothing could make.

She gritted her teeth and took a few strokes. No headway at all. She swallowed some more water and the icy fingers of panic clutched at her.

"Keep your head!" she counselled herself silently. "Don't try to get ashore. Drift with the current. There's smooth water below."

She tried to take her own sage advice. But a strong under-surface current caught her feet and dragged them down.

As her head went under water, unmitigated terror swept over her. She gasped and water went up her nose, began to strangle her. She threshed about wildly and came to the surface for a fleeting instant.

Water blinded her. She tried to call out and water choked her. She tried to swim and water closed over her head.

Faintly, as from a great distance, she heard some one shouting frantically.

Then she heard nothing more but the roar of the water against her bursting eardrums.

Her next sensation was of an agonizing pain in her lower ribs and the small of her back, of a raw burning in her nose and throat. The roar of water was no longer in her ears, but she felt as though she were packed in ice.

A quick, firm pressure on her ribs sent the breath hissing through her lips. It flashed into her numbed brain that some one must be applying artificial respiration. She was vaguely surprised that artificial respiration should hurt.

Under the next ministration she moaned faintly, tried feebly to raise her heavy head.

"Thank God!" a hoarse voice exclaimed. "She's all right now. Throw me another blanket. Can't you find some more wood for that fire?"

There was a confused babble of voices around her. By sheer strength

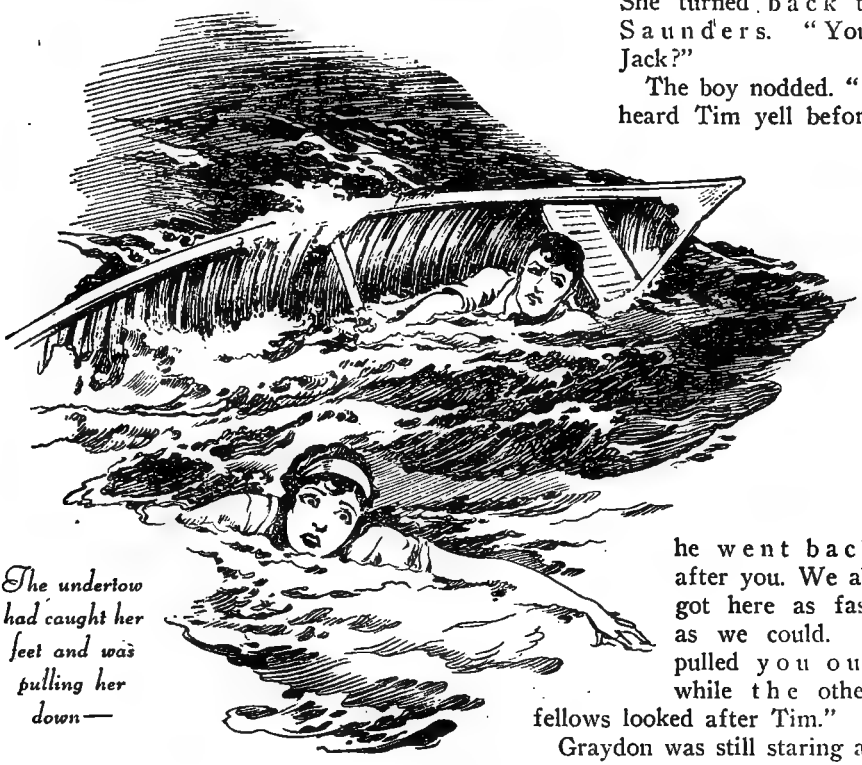
of will she opened her eyes. She was lying under a blanket beside a driftwood fire.

She turned her eyes slowly around the circle of anxious faces. Barbara was there, her shining hair disheveled, her white face wet with tears. Allison was there, drawing the blanket closer around her chum's cold shoulders.

The whole gang was there, their faces pale and drawn in the flickering light.

She looked up at Jack. "Where's —where's Tim?" she whispered painfully.

Jack indicated another form partly covered by a blanket. "He's all right now. He wasn't as badly off as you were."



The undertow had caught her feet and was pulling her down—

The figure under the other blanket sat up slowly. Tim's haggard eyes stared into Lucy's.

"I tried—to get you out," he said. "I—I couldn't make it."

"That's—all right," Lucy answered. She turned back to Saunders. "You, Jack?"

The boy nodded. "I heard Tim yell before he went back after you. We all got here as fast as we could. I pulled you out while the other fellows looked after Tim."

Graydon was still staring at her, with that intense, strained look on his face.

"Why did you say—'O K,' Lucy?" he asked hoarsely.

"More important—for you—to get ashore than for me," said Lucy. "I'm not—an eminent psychologist."

Graydon's pale face twitched spasmodically. His blue lips trembled. "God in heaven!" he whispered.

Lucy turned troubled eyes to Jack. "Take Tim home as soon as you can," she said. "He's—he's just getting over pneumonia."

Then she dropped her weary head and abandoned herself to the blessed warmth of the fire.

IT was a pale, languid Lucy who lay in the porch swing the next morning. Her chest hurt, her back ached, her head throbbed.

She wondered how Tim Graydon was. Barbara had come back from the Longs' house half an hour ago and reported that Tim was just getting up. Evidently he wasn't going to have another attack of pneumonia, anyhow.

She shut her eyes and wished she could stop hearing the rush of water against her ears. She opened them again when a voice said gently:

"Do you feel like talking to me, Lucy?"

A rather subdued edition of Tim Graydon stood looking down at her. He had heavy circles under his eyes, a tender, though wan smile on his firm young mouth.

"Always feel like talking," said Lucy. "Not even a whole river can shut me up."

Involuntarily she moved back into the swing. Tim sat down beside her.

"I really don't know what to say to you," he began hesitantly. "I don't know whether to thank you or praise you—or bawl you out. You're a dear, unselfish little idiot."

Lucy blinked dazedly. "Am I?"

"You are. Why didn't you tell me, when I asked you, that you weren't much of a swimmer? I never noticed, when we were down at the beach, that you kept out of the deep water. And why did you tell me you were all right when you knew perfectly well you'd probably drown?"

Lucy began a reiteration of her former explanation. "I thought it was more important—"

Tim's voice was reverent. "I never knew," he said slowly, "that they made women like you."

"Oh, occasionally they do," said Lucy flippantly. "But fortunately not many. Or we'd be a race of gargoyles."

"Don't be a fool!" said Tim impatiently. He was silent a moment, seemingly immersed in thought. "Has this man of yours been over to inquire about you?"

"Yes," said Lucy truthfully.

Tim's eyebrows went up. "Oh, then he's interested at last?"

"I don't know that he is," said Lucy. "I think he is just polite."

"Was he there on the beach last night?" asked Tim. "Did he realize what a narrow escape you had?"

"Yes, he was there." Lucy laughed suddenly. "Let's play 'Twenty Questions,' Tim. Perhaps you can locate him that way."

"I don't want to locate him," said Tim shortly.

He rose abruptly, went over to the railing and stood there for a space, staring down at the river. When he turned back to Lucy, his face was set grimly.

"Look here, Lucy," he said tensely. "That fellow, whoever he is, isn't going to have you."

Lucy gasped. "Why—why not?"

"Because he hasn't any right to you. No other man has any right to you. You belong to me. I understand you. In a way, I made you over. You're mine. I love you and I'm not going to let any other man, particularly a sap like that fellow, get you away from me."

Lucy's eyes were very bright. "Huh!" she said, with something of her old, scornful manner. "Just what are you going to do about it, Tim?"

"This," said Tim.

He stooped over the swing, picked her up in his arms, lifted her until her flushed cheek was resting against his pounding heart. For an instant he gazed into her startled eyes. Then his lips pressed hers, hungrily, deeply, passionately.

Lucy had no defense against that kiss. She resisted it for an almost inappreciable second.

Then one of her brown hands crept up behind Tim's neck. The other rested caressingly against his hot cheek. And she kissed him back, just as hungrily, just as passionately, as he had kissed her.

Finally Tim set her on her feet.

"There!" he said unsteadily. "That makes you mine. You can't possibly belong to another fellow, after you've kissed me like that."

"I—I guess I can't," Lucy admitted at last.

"And you'll forget about this other man?" he demanded.

A wisdom worthy of Cleopatra herself came to Lucy. Tim was all the conquering male, glorying in the rout of his supposed rival. Let him remain that way.

"I'll forget him, Tim," she promised meekly.

"And you'll marry me just as soon as we go back to the city?"

"Yes," said Lucy.

After a while she disengaged herself enough to say, with a happy chuckle: "What a swell combination we'll make, Tim! An eminent psychologist and a cock-eyed clown!"

Tim laughed tenderly. "The talkies prove that there is always a romantic heart beating under every clown's motley," he gibed.

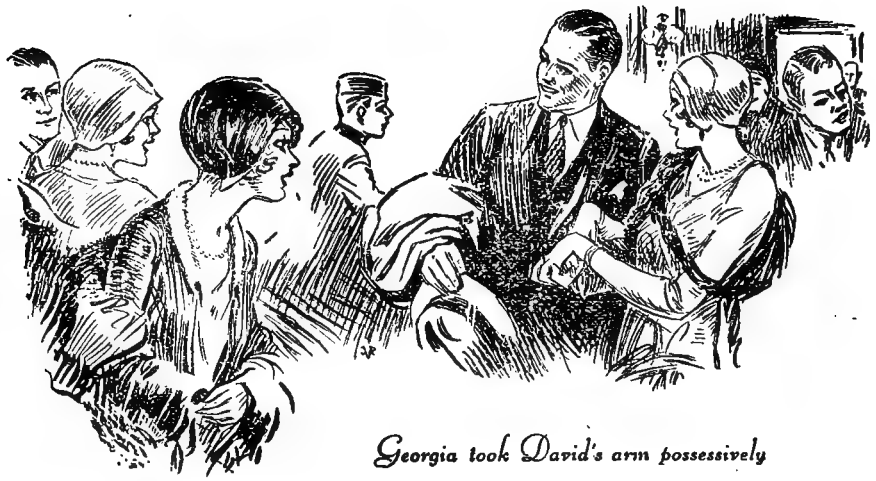
Lucy giggled. "The orchestra will now render 'Pagliacci,'" she said.

Tim drew her close to him again. "There is never going to be any 'Pagliacci' for you," he said. "You quaint, adorable, lovable little—clown!"

The Moon

THE fingers of the moon, so white,
Twine round our fingers, childish-wise,
She leads us by the hand to-night
Down the dim trail to Paradise.

—*Mary Carolyn Davies.*



Georgia took David's arm possessively

Everything But Love

Her new wealth purchases for Rose her heart's desire—for a little while. And then comes the thing she feared

By Mary Frances Doner

THE STORY SO FAR

ROSE BARKER had been born on "the wrong side of the bridge." In Barrytown, that meant that she was socially ineligible. Further, she was the daughter of old Pindy Barker, town miser. In all her starved life, Rose had never had enough food, enough clothing—or enough love.

So when old Pindy died suddenly and Rose found herself heiress to many thousands of dollars, the first thing she did was to install herself in a lovely old house on the *right* side of the bridge, with servants and plenty of pretty clothes. Near Georgia Hoyt, the only school girl chum who had stayed her friend as they grew up—and near David Marsh, newcomer in town, whom every Barrytown girl thought she wanted.

Rose loved him. For always.

But she was just a newly-rich nobody, and

David's family had the best blood in the county.

CHAPTER VI

GEORGIA dropped in late the next morning.

"For cryin' in the night!" she greeted Rose. "What was the big idea, walking out on Cricket that way? He said he knew you couldn't see him anyway—and the poor darling has fallen for you. I guess he's the kind that loves but once—and you're it. Being more elusive than the others, you intrigued him. Lord—I'm dead!" Georgia threw herself on the big davenport before the fire, tossed off her little felt hat and leopard sports coat and sighed. "Come on, little one, divulge the dark secret. *Why* did you disappear?"

"You're kind, Georgia, and I love you." Rose seated herself on the broad bench beyond. "But—I understand. I don't belong. You're trying to deaden the blow—"

"Don't be too silly!" rapped out Georgia. "See here! What you are depends upon yourself. You were so fine and decent and dignified last night that you made Sonia feel like an utter fool. She's ready to admit it to-day. So is Polly. And when they found that David Marsh thought you important enough to come rushing over here after you in an attempt to carry you back—"

"He didn't tell!"

"He did tell! Now, how come? Out with it. What did you do to that blasé young gentleman?" Despite Georgia's lightness of manner, her eyes were suddenly sharp and curious.

"I was just as surprised as you," admitted Rose. But she could not meet Georgia's keen glance.

Georgia shrugged, jumped to her feet and laughed. "It was a blow to that smug Lola, thank the Lord! Cricket was ready to commit murder, and Lola got nasty, and then Sonia took your part. Sonia always likes a fight—well, anyway, she and Polly are out in the car and they want to come in and see you. You've arrived, my dear—what with David Marsh singling you out it should be smooth sailing. I'm going to get the girls."

SONIA never minced words. "Please shake hands, Rose Barker," she said. "I was a fool last night—Oh, say—a cigarette?" She smiled, shrugged and helped herself out of the little silver box on Rose's table.

Polly said, "I acted like an idiot at the party—but then I'm that way most of the time. My friends understand. Will you?" She dropped her cheek against Rose's for a brief moment, then danced over to Georgia and sank down beside her on the big couch. "Lawdee—I'm a wreck! Sixty-five men with wooden feet stepped on every toe I own last night."

Amazing how quickly last night was forgotten, how quickly they had initiated Rose into their midst. But she knew. David's careless gesture was responsible. David and Georgia. Otherwise—

Georgia said now, "We'd stay to lunch if we were asked—and all calories considered!"

It was too wonderful. Sonia and Polly and Georgia sitting here beside her fire asking for lunch, laughing and chatting with her as if she had always been one of them instead of Rose Barker of the shack below the bridge.

Effie knew how to prepare the sort of luncheon these girls demanded. Effie knew how to serve it. Already she bristled with her new importance.

Georgia said, "It's so cold outside and so cosy here by the fire; can't Effie drag that gateleg table up and—Sonia tells the best fortunes with tea leaves—I have lemon, Effie, and Polly takes the thickest cream in the world! And look at her! Would you believe it? While I starve myself to death and never look less than two hundred—"

Everybody laughed. They talked about last night; Dwight Dennison and his tyrannous Laura and their big row at the party. Of Muriel Gracey's gown and her new man.

Rose was too happy. She was afraid she was dreaming all this. And her thoughts flew to David. If he could see her now, presiding at her table, entertaining these girls, joining in their laughter and their lives. David—David—

Presently Effie came in, announcing a Mr. Hearth. Georgia shrieked, "Hi—Cricket, come on in! We're having food!"

And Polly called, "Aren't you proper, making party calls, only Sonia gave the party, you know!" And she winked at Rose—made her one of them definitely.

He came over to Rose, stood there smiling into her eyes. His smile said, "You *are* beautiful, you are—"

He said, "I know I'm a flat tire and my best friends won't tell me, but, fair damsel, why did you walk out on me last night?"

"She was bored to death, probably," supplied Georgia with a giggle. "Who wouldn't be—dancing eternally with you, Cricket, and not a chance to try another man present. Pig!"

They all knew it wasn't true, but every one laughed at Cricket. Sonia laid a hand over Rose's and said, "If you've come to rag Rose, you're wasting your time. We won't tolerate it!"

Rose flashed her a grateful smile. Even if she didn't mean it, it sounded wonderful. Friends— She warmed her hungry heart at the flame of that word.

"I came hoping to be invited to lunch," said Cricket.

"A-ha!" put in Polly. "You've degenerated into a beachcomber, it seems! If you think you're going to snatch these priceless cheese rolls out of our mouths, you're mistaken!"

"There's plenty in the kitchen, Miss Polly," Effie assured her in a whisper. And every one laughed and another place was set and Cricket sat down beside Rose.

INSPIRED with the confidence they had given her, breaking through the shell of fear, conquering the inferiority complex that had always imprisoned her charm, Rose became one of them now.

Yet above this new joy, this new confidence, thoughts of David wreathed with nebulous perfume through her mind. "I will make him love me!" she promised herself. "I will win him. Because I love him; because we were meant for each other. I—*will!*"

"How about a rubber of bridge?" asked Georgia, when the luncheon table had been cleared away.

"Cut in?" asked Sonia lazily, glancing at the flames.

"Righto!" agreed Georgia.

"I don't play," Rose said simply, "but please, won't you? I'd love to watch."

"We'll teach you," offered Polly.

"If Rose wants us to play, let's play!" decided Georgia. "I've wanted to test old Cricket's style. Come on—there'll be lots of days when we're alone. Rose can learn then. I know she'd rather."

Gratefully, Rose met her smile. Georgia understood. It was always this way with Georgia. It seemed that she could look right into your heart and sense your worries and troubles and dispel them.

The table was brought, cards, and the four proceeded to lose themselves in the delight of the game. Cricket turned now and then to speak to Rose. There was natural pleasure at his interest. She liked Cricket. If it hadn't been for David—

Polly was dummy. She sat back. "Well, whether you like gossip with your game or not, you're going to get it. Guess what I heard this morning?"

Cricket said, "If there's one thing I dislike more than another—"

"We all know the end of the sentence," put in Polly easily. "But I haven't had a second up to now to tell you. Dad came home from the office unexpectedly this morning, rushing off on his way to New York. He says that David Marsh is going to be let out by his uncle—"

"No!" Georgia's sharp word drew all eyes to her. She colored, laughed lamely and demanded to know the trump.

Rose's hands clenched slowly in her lap. David—going—

"Yes, really!" went on Polly, conscious now of the stir she had created. "They've lost some money through him, and accounts have been mixed. There was a shipment consigned to some town by mistake—a big shipment. *And*—father heard Mr. Somerset say, himself, that David's father is fed up and won't give David another cent. Isn't it too bad? God knows we'll have a suicide on our hands now—with Lola practicing the wedding march and pricing veils—"

"I don't believe it!" Sonia made her bid and tossed the cards to Cricket. "Your make—my deal."

"You wouldn't," retorted Polly, "unless you had the privilege of passing along the juicy morsel yourself!"

"Meow!" whined Cricket. "Now, if it isn't asking too much, would some one lead?"

ROSE heard them vaguely. No—it couldn't be true. Her throat ached, things danced before her eyes. And her glance turned to Georgia, who sat playing mechanically, a strange, set expression on her usually smiling face.

They played three rubbers of bridge and the girls finally trouped off with Cricket.

"Remember," was Polly's parting word to Rose, "Cricket will come by for you around seven. We're going to the movies in Port Severn, and up to Ray and Ella Stearns's afterward. I can't help it if you're tired—you've got to come!"

Rose caught Cricket's farewell smile as Georgia said, "Of course she's coming, why not?" and with a swift embrace hurried out with the others.

They wanted her, then. A miracle had happened. She roamed through the lovely rooms like a child in a beautiful garden. But beating against this new happiness was the consciousness of David's impending departure.

"He can't go!" she whispered to herself, "just now—when everything is coming out all right for me. He *can't!*"

She dressed carefully for the party that night. The smart black velvet jacket frock with its scalloped surplice collar of ermine lay soft and effective against her smooth white throat. The little black velvet hat sweeping low above her shining eyes made an en-

chanting picture. She fingered her pearls as she waited, gazing at this apparition in the mirror. Was this Rose Barker?

"For you, David!" she whispered. "If it wins one smile, one word—Oh, David, don't go away!—"

What a riotous party! A flock of cars speeding northward toward Port Severn and the new Metropolitan theater; Cricket holding her arm close as they passed through the brilliant lobby, and Georgia torturing Leslie, the man who loved her, with all sorts of gay innuendos to another just for the fun of it. And Sonia and Polly and their men bantering back and forth—

"There are more women in this darned neck of the woods!" Cricket was complaining, his hand finding Rose's. "I called on one to-day—and found four!"

"I thought we had fun," Rose said, smiling up at him.

"We did," he agreed, "but I didn't expect to see the whole population of Barrytown."

"I shouldn't have been half so interesting," she confessed. "You really were spared a tiresome half hour."

"Rose!" He was suddenly serious. "Don't say those things to me. Haven't you seen that I—care?"

Her heart raced with the thrill those words always effect in a woman. Cricket was fine, splendid. She liked him. If David had said those words—

"Cricket, you hardly know me."

"I know you better than any one. I've known you all my life. I've wondered when I would meet you—Rose—"

"Don't take him seriously!" warned Polly, who followed them close behind. "He's the quiet, serious type, and take it from one who knows—they never *mean* it!"

"Don't listen to that cat, Rose!" warned Sonia. "Between you and me, she's inclined to favor the Cricket person, herself. It's a defensive battle—say, what are you staring at, Georgia? Seen a ghost? Oh—it's David Marsh!"

"AND he's alone!" came Polly's sibilant whisper, as they made their way through the theater lobby.

"Annex him at once!" ordered Sonia. "I know I'm going to need him before the evening's over. This partner of mine shows signs already of dying on my hands."

Georgia broke away and ran on ahead breathlessly, slipped an arm through David's gaily and bore him along with the others.

"But—I'm waiting for my aunt and uncle," he protested. "They're coming on from some dinner—"

"Well, they're doomed to disappointment," laughed Georgia. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes too bright. Her voice was a voice that Rose had never heard before.

"Heigh-ho!" Sonia greeted him. "Stand by me, David Marsh. The person you see beside you now *will* discuss international law. I feel hysterics coming on."

Not until they were all seated in the darkened loge did Rose realize that David Marsh sat between her and Georgia. He glanced up indifferently. Their eyes met, and he smiled.

"Oh, hello!"

"H-hello!"

Cricket was demanding her attention on the other side. But in the dimness, her eyes would travel back to David to study his profile, his restless hands, the discontented smile.

Once he said, "What kind of a thing is this party going to be afterward?

I'm fed up with social doings in this neck of the woods."

"I don't know the people," she admitted.

"Hm—" he smiled. "They seem to be giving you a rush these days. Having a good time?"

"Yes."

"I wonder what you'd think of a real party?" he said, and closed his eyes sharply and beat his fist with a soft gesture against his knee. "These people here think they're having a good time. Lord, what I wouldn't give to be back in New York!"

"What's wrong with that picture?" demanded Georgia, touching David's hand playfully. "Will you please divide your attention, David Marsh?" Her voice was gay—sharply gay, it seemed. "The man on my left is in love with his wife, and you've deserted me entirely—"

"Too bad!" smiled David. "But if the hero kisses the heroine once more, I'm fading from the picture. That's a warning!"

Cricket stole Rose's hand. "I've got to get back home in a couple of days. Can't I see something of you—alone—before I leave?"

David overheard. He turned to Rose. "What's the matter with this town? Everybody's leaving. Did you know I'm leaving Sunday?"

"You're—*not!*" escaped from her. A breathless, whispered word.

"Sure thing. I'm off for parts unknown. Probably the next time you hear of me I'll be trekking through the wilds of China—"

"Don't go!" She hated herself for saying it—but she had to. She was helpless.

He laughed softly. "Why not? They'll all forget me the minute the train pulls out."

"I won't—forget you—"

It was dim and hushed in the theater, but their eyes met and hers betrayed her. There was beauty here that even a casual eye could not ignore. It held David's gaze.

He said impulsively, "You're pretty, Rose—and that fellow over there is in love with you." He shrugged toward Cricket. "Up to his neck—in love!" David warned her with a grin. "But don't be too hasty," he advised, suppressing a yawn.

"I won't—"

But he was watching the screen now. The impersonal nature of his remarks convinced her of the hopelessness of her secret passion. She turned to Cricket and devoted her entire attention to him from that moment: laughing, whispering, vaguely encouraging him. His eyes shone with happiness that mocked her.

THROUGHOUT the evening the Stearns's party, she was parently without a serious thought. Seldom did she even glance toward David. "I've got to make up my mind *now*," she told herself. "I've got to make myself believe he was a dream—that he never existed. It's the only way I can conquer it. I've got to."

What little things shape destinies! Shortly after supper, Ella Stearns proposed the game, "Intelligence Plus." You had to answer a certain number of questions, and if you failed on your requirement you were at the mercy of the "judge." Sonia was invested with that dignified and ruthless rôle.

When Rose failed, Sonia demanded a love song—to be sung at Cricket's knee. It was a pretty picture. Rose sang softly, gently, "I Love You

Truly." Polly played for her. The room was hushed. Rose could not have known how lovely she was, sitting there in her black frock on the hassock at Cricket's knee.

Once her glance met David's. He was watching her curiously, but as their eyes met he turned away, shrugged and rudely picked up a book from the table.

When David lost, he was told he had to give an imitation of John Gilbert in a passionate love scene—with Rose Barker taking the part of lovely Greta Garbo.

A sudden hush fell on the room. David Marsh, the handsome, blasé New York chap, who had ravished hearts right and left since his arrival, grinned indifferently and crushed out the end of his cigarette as he swung to his feet. Cricket sat by moodily, trying to be a good sport, but his rebellious glance wandered to Georgia where she sat watching the scene, curiously detached from it all.

As David reached her chair, Rose got to her feet with a faltering gesture, one trembling hand at her throat. She felt herself swept close in his arms, felt his cheek touch hers for a moment, his lips against her lips. Held there in his embrace, she tasted an ecstasy that made her faint and weak. As his eyes met hers, it seemed this could not be a game—a forfeit he was paying. Fate had taken this way to toss a few crumbs before Rose Barker from the banquet of life. And it was cruel!

She whispered his name—unconscious of the act. He kissed her again. And she wondered if the sudden warmth of that second kiss was significant. Had he sensed her love for him? That aching, torturing love?—He smiled. In the depths of those cool gray eyes did she see an answering spark? David—

But the moment was over.

"A BIT crude," observed Sonia amusedly. "Your technique could stand polishing, David."

He lighted a cigarette, grinned at her through the little flame. "Those in the know tell me I'm improving." He walked to the opposite end of the room and took a chair close to Georgia—Georgia, whose curious expression was one of bitterness and jealousy and pain.

Rose's gaze followed him helplessly. She seemed to be removed from these people and their laughter and fun. She had glimpsed heaven. David—

"I'd say this fool game is getting tiresome," Cricket declared.

Some one turned on the victrola and they began to dance. Cricket snatched up Rose. Music. Dancing— Things dazzled Rose to-night. She wanted to fly from the crowd and the noise, away to the solitude of the night and remembrance of that moment. David's kiss—

"Is it true, David," called Polly above the din, "that you're going away soon?"

He turned from Georgia, nodded.

"No tears, please. Be brave, all of you." He snatched up a banjo that lay on a bench beside him. "And since you've brought up the subject, I'll make farewells now." There was a recklessness about him to-night, a mad gayety. "I kiss your hand, madame!—" he sang, and stood before Sonia while he elaborately interpreted the lyric.

"You were meant for me—" he sang to Georgia, and Georgia smiled up at him gamely, but Rose *knew*. There was a strange light in Georgia's eyes—

Cricket drew Rose into the library. "Let's not stay for the vaudeville," he growled. "Georgia can go home with the others. I've got the key to the car. She won't mind."

He left word with the maid and they slipped out. So Rose escaped from the agony of seeing David flaunt before her the fact that as yet he was fancy free.

CHAPTER VII

SHE listened vaguely to Cricket's love-making on the way home. Once to have had this man in love with her would have been a great thrill. Now, she closed her eyes and dreamed it was David—David saying those words, catching her hand in his, kissing her fingers one by one, his voice low and uncertain. David whispering, "See that star up there, Rose? I'd like to snatch it down and put it on your finger, because—I love you so!"

They reached her house at last, and she slipped out of the car quickly and called back good-by and waved in a rush of frenzy to be away from him. He stood looking at her as she fled up the steps and unlocked the door. He called to her, "Rose—Rose, wait—please!"

"To-morrow, Cricket—good night!" she called, and disappeared inside. He would think her mad. She was, probably. To-night had stirred her too deeply. Little things couldn't count—to-night.

After a while, she heard him drive away—standing tense and breathless against the wall in the dim reception room—and she dropped her wrap to the floor and went in to sit before the fire.

Lost in the dream that her heart would not relinquish, in the sweet madness of what-might-have-been, the sound of the telephone bell brought her back to reality. And then—David's voice came to her over the wire.

"For disappearing," he told her, "you have no rival."

She must be gay and flippant. He expected it of girls. "Well then," she answered, "present your formidable arguments against a graceful exit."

"Your exits are more than graceful. They're phenomenal," he told her. "You're a magician."

"Well, not exactly," she laughed, "but the idea is worth something." She was trembling with excitement. If she could only still the tremor in her voice—

"I hadn't gotten around to you in the list of farewells," he said. "You came next and I was about to sing, 'I'll Always Be in Love With You.'"

Absurd, ridiculous—yet her heart pounded, her throat was dry, her hand shook. "Too bad," she said with a weak laugh. "And you have such a nice voice!" Oh, David, David—the cruelty of this!

"I can sing it now," he offered.

"But didn't you sing it to—to some one else? You hadn't reached Polly." Another brave, tremulous laugh.

"For Polly's benefit I rendered 'Just You—Just Me!' And for Ella's 'Mean To Me!'"

"Is she?" Rose heard herself ask. Oh, this was playing the game until you wanted to die with the pain of it.

"All women are but you, except when you run away." He was laughing at her, he must be. What had prompted him to call her now?

"I wanted to see you to-night—especially," he said, as if sensing her thoughts.

"I'm flattered—" Oh, David, spare me any more of this!

"And I'm disappointed," he went on. "A proposal over the 'phone isn't the most romantic thing in the world."

Her hand tightened on the receiver. "Sing your farewell song, I promise not to take you seriously."

His voice was suddenly serious. "Promise me that you will!" The words were clipped off, sharp, almost. And at the dead silence that followed he went on. "Rose, I'm leaving Barrytown Monday morning. Will you go with me—as my wife?"

Her faint laughter reached him—faint, terrible laughter. "You are so funny, David Marsh—so funny—"

The receiver did not click. It fell from her nerveless hand as she dropped to her knees and buried her head in her arms—

THE door bell rang repeatedly before she went to answer it. Georgia, probably. She dabbed at wet eyes—at tear-stained cheeks.

When she saw David standing there, she realized the uselessness of pretense. Convicted of her love, she faced him bravely.

"I didn't know you—you cared for me like this, Rose." He put his hands on her shoulders.

Flushed with shame she turned away.

"Laugh at me," she whispered through stubborn tears. "I can stand it. I've learned how to stand things—"

"*Rose!*" His face was white, his hands shook as they took hers. "I came here to-night to lie to you. I'm going to be honest with you now. I'm broke. I can't make the grade here with my uncle, and he's letting me out. I've always wanted to fly—it's been my dream since I can remember. There isn't any way—alone—not for years, and then it will be too late. To-night, I made up my mind to come to you with a fairy tale about being in love with you—and all that stuff."

He laughed half-heartedly.

"I'm not in love—I probably never will be. I'm not the sentimental sort. See? But—when I saw that you cared, I couldn't lie to you. If you'd marry me, we'd both be getting the thing we want. It came to me just now. That may sound conceited—I don't mean it that way. If I mean happiness to you, and you can help me follow the career I want, why isn't it a fair arrangement? I'm not too bad, Rose—and I'll be as good to you as I know how. I like you—well, rather more than any one here I've met. And—some day, when I've come into my money, we'll discuss that end of it, too."

If he had said he loved her, she would have recoiled from the lie—and him. But here was honesty—cruel, perhaps, yet clean. Slowly her eyes met his, searchingly.

She saw her destiny there—all that life meant, all it ever could mean. Let him be kind or cruel, loving or indifferent, he was her man. She loved him. There are no terms where love is concerned. You can't bargain with fate.

He said gently now, "Will you have me, Rose?"

She threw back her head, covered her white face with trembling hands. "Sometime—you will fall in love. What will I do then?"

He laughed boisterously. "If you'll accept a written guarantee to the effect that I'm the one immune specimen—"

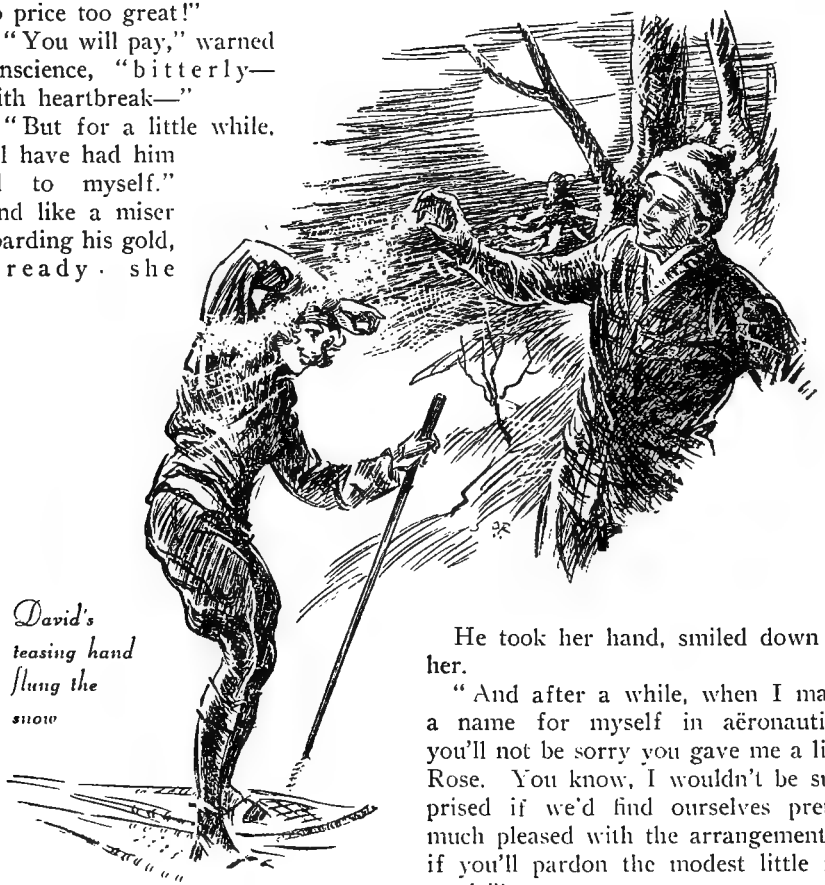
How confident he was! How brave! When this ravishing madness possessed him, what would become of her? Would he hesitate then and consider his promises, his proud boast of immunity to love? No. He would bend

his shoulders to the chains, helpless—and she would lose him.

"But you can't lose what you've never had," argued conscience. Sick at heart, she argued back. "I want him—I love him—there is no price too great!"

"You will pay," warned conscience, "bitterly—with heartbreak—"

"But for a little while, I'll have had him all to myself." And like a miser hoarding his gold, already she thought gloatingly of the kiss he had given her, of his kind smile, his gentle words—



David's teasing hand flung the snow

"DON'T take it so seriously, Rose," he was saying. "Most people marry with veils of illusion hanging between them. You and I know what's ahead. Marriage can be an intelligent partnership as well as a dream of bliss. And it can last longer when you know where you're at."

Of course, it was true—everything he said was true. She nodded.

He took her hand, smiled down at her.

"And after a while, when I make a name for myself in aëronautics, you'll not be sorry you gave me a lift, Rose. You know, I wouldn't be surprised if we'd find ourselves pretty much pleased with the arrangement—if you'll pardon the modest little remark!"

He swept her into one arm, as a brother might, and kissed her boyishly.

"Don't tell the gang. Let's surprise 'em. Just close up the house here, and you can make plans about it later. Rose, you're a great kid, do you know that? Keep on thinking I'm slightly above the zero mark, will you? A fellow has to have some one who thinks he's O K,

or his self-esteem takes an awful fall. I've darn near come to the point where I think I don't register—with any one who's got brains—except you." He laughed into her wide, startled eyes. "Your eyes say you love me. Do you?"

"Yes—"

He hugged her to his heart—as a brother might hug a sister. "It isn't in the bargain that you can't tell me about it—quite often, if you care to! Well, I've kept you up pretty late. Adios, bride-to-be! I'll drop in tomorrow afternoon, if you're not busy. We can make final plans then."

With a wave of the hand, a gay smile, he was gone.

She stood watching him down the street, hearing the crunch of his steps in the hard, dry snow; hearing him whistle as he went—

I'll always be in love with you—

And laughing a little madly, she put out the lights one by one and climbed the stairs to her room. "Oh, God!" she prayed, falling to her knees beside the bed. "What is pride? What is sense—and reason—and judgment? I only know—*love*—"

CHAPTER VIII

A WEEK later she stood looking down the broad stairs of Ravine Lodge in a red dress, all soft and shimmery, and slippers with diamond buckles. Slowly she descended, a timid smile lighting her eager young eyes, breathless, radiant.

The radio played "Lonely Troubador," and over against the fireplace stood David, strumming his banjo and crooning the song in a voice that made Rose's heart stand still. He laid it down as she came toward him, still crooning, and stretched out his arms. "Let's dance, beautiful—"

Silly little name, perhaps. Beautiful. Bits of dream cobwebs and star dust and angels' laughter caught in a word and tossed to her. Beautiful—

Outside, the snow was piled against the windows, and sighing pines sent vagrant flakes scurrying in the wind. Outside, a moon came and went from beneath feathery clouds and the world was still and beautiful. A radio whispering, candlelight, old family servants busy with a fragrant dinner out beyond, and David here holding out arms to her. "Let's dance."

Listen to my song!
A lonely troubador is singing for
A little word of love—from you;
A tender kiss or two,
And happiness I never knew—

Dave's grin, Dave's funny little hug, funny little kiss brushed across a cheek that tingled madly with the touch of those lips.

He begged again:

Listen to my song!
And let my melody proclaim for me
That you're the one that I adore!
And if you answer no,
Then on my way I'll go,
To be forevermore a lonely troubador!

The announcer's voice broke the spell. Dave laughed gayly, kissed the tip of her nose, her hair, the hand that he held so close. "Aren't you grand!" He held her off a bit, appraised her with a dignified scowl. "My dear, I feel like a lumberjack in this rig, and you looking like Princess What's-her-name. I didn't know we'd dress for dinner out here."

She blushed with confusion, and he hastened to reassure her, "It's O K, beautiful! I want you to look grand."

She clasped her hands before her, shut her eyes tight, tight.

"Oh, Dave, isn't it wonderful here? I feel so shut away from—everything— Those mountains over there in the moonlight—and the big trees—and—you," softly.

He stood looking down at her for a moment. "Do you know, young lady, you're not a bit hard on the eyes?" And turning rather abruptly, vaulted the stairs two at a time, shouting back over his shoulder, "Tell Tim and Ella, if they announce dinner, that I've got to be grand too or I'll develop an inferiority complex!"

SHE watched that bend in the stairs where he had disappeared, one hand at her throat, a little song lilting blissfully through her consciousness. The song he had sung. Dave—The sweetness of that word. Dave, my husband—

Blinking hard—blinking back grateful tears, she seated herself before the fire and let her head fall back. The big chair framed her like an old painting. It must be a dream— His kindness, his sweetness, his gay, careless abandon. A little boy growing up, laughing at cares and fears, a spoiled little boy who had never been spanked and never expected to be; triumphant now to have gained his end and outwitted his father and secured his future in aviation through her.

Was that all—oh, was it all? Wasn't there somewhere an answering spark to the terrible need she felt for him? Was it all fun and laughter and triumph and an assured future?

Careful steps just beyond, and a rather elderly woman appeared in the doorway, trim and fresh in a dark calico dress with white apron and collar and cuffs.

"I hope there's no draft on you, Mis' Marsh," she said respectfully. "With that low-cut gown—and ain't it a pretty one, though! Ah, but you're beautiful, Mis' Marsh. All the Marsh wives have been beautiful—and her that came before you, the mother of him that's upstairs—" She shrugged and shook her head and folded her arms reminiscently. "Sure, she was like the sun—with hair like gold and eyes so bright and blue, and lovin' her man, with a love that kept her in the clouds."

"Tell me more, Ella!"

Hunger prodding her on to know the background of this family, of her husband, David Marsh. David's wife—she was that. She had that wonderful rôle. The Marsh wives—she was one of them. She had taken the hand of that woman who had gone, David's mother; she had joined the long invisible chain.

"Please," she begged.

Ella shook her head kindly, smiled reminiscently.

"It's many a year I've seen service in this fine old lodge—me and Tim. And it's many a grand lady I've served, but there's been none prettier than you, my lady. It's when Tim and I was first married—and I do forget how long ago that was—that young David's grandfather took us on as caretakers here. When a Marsh is twenty-one, this property goes to him outright. It's his pleasure to do as he will with it, except—it can't pass out of the family, or at least it shouldn't. It's legend and tradition; it's part of their hearts, the Marshes."

She smiled gently.

"And it's why he brought you here now, don't you see? They love it—they're happy here, and it's where they come on their honeymoons. Tell me

now, is it lonesome you are, leavin' your own home and people?"

IT was David's whistle as he came racing down the stairs that spared Rose an answer.

"How about beans?" he demanded, grinning across at old Ella.

"It's been ready half an hour," she told him, shaking her head. "And if it's late bein' served, it's yourself that's to blame, Master David. What with bringin' the prettiest girl in the world here for me to see—I don't know whether I'm comin' or goin'!"

"I'll solve that one for you!" he laughed as he shooed her away. "You're going. Don't you think any one else likes to look at her?"

Words. Banter. Rose smiled back at him with understanding. A little fun for Ella's benefit, that was all.

"Great old girl, Ella," Dave said now, hunching down in a chair opposite and studying Rose. "She and Tim—well, I guess they've hit it off peacefully now for around fifty years. Remarkable!" He shrugged, turned to watch the flames. "Cosy, isn't it? Rip-roaring fire—hey, hey! There's old Tim with the cocktails now. Let's go!"

Rose and David at either end of the heavy old oak table, where Marshes had sat with their brides for generations. Candles glowing between them; a perfectly turned fowl before David, which he carved with amusing flourishes. Ella's sparkling jelly, a white mound of snowy potatoes whipped to delectable froth; carrots gleaming with rich country butter; hot golden brown rolls from Ella's experienced fingers.

"I wired dad to-day," David told Rose. "Told him we were here. He'd expect it naturally—when he knew I was married. It's a custom in the family. There'll be some message to-night. He'll be slightly surprised, I imagine." He chuckled as he leaned toward her. "I'm sure now. It's your eyes. I haven't been able to decide. They're disturbing. Did any one ever tell you that?"

"A man or two," she confessed. "Mostly Cricket."

His amused laugh told her that it roused no primitive anger in him. "Cricket—well, he wasn't a bad scout. Took things too seriously, though. He fell for you, didn't he? I wonder what he said when he found that the bird had flown?"

"Probably said, 'No—really?' or something similar." She could be flippant, too.

"You made a mistake, Rose. You should have taken him instead."

"Perhaps—" Her indifferent smile did not betray her.

Back again before the fire, David paced restlessly. The radio crooned on. Twice David begged Rose to dance, then as abruptly he would change the dials and pick up his banjo. Restless, spoiled David—

Rose wandered about. She found a book of poems among the volumes on the shelves near the fireplace. David had subsided, engrossed for a moment with a game of solitaire. He called over presently, "It's a clear night and there's fresh snow. Let's trek around in snowshoes for a while—if you want to."

A LITTLE later they started out, warmly clad in woolens and snowshoes. Moon above burdened trees sagging, and the far off whistle of a train the only sound in the dead silence. Except their laughter, their young voices. One with the restless urge of living and getting his own

way and being amused, one with the golden minor of love muted to a thin, exquisite note.

Down along the trail in the virgin snow together, singing — silly songs, perhaps. Dave's swift hand flinging back a cloud of snow now and then to tease—

Oh, the beauty of it, the unforgetable sweetness!

They came back later, rosy and breathless, health singing in their cheeks. And Ella had hot coffee for them, and some of her famous doughnuts, and they ate like wolves and curled up before the fire, a boy and girl happy together, with the world shut out and only themselves to know this pleasant hour.

He said, as he ran a swift hand through the tumbled gold of Rose's hair, "Gee, it's pretty! You're pretty, Rose. You're a good sport, too. Are you happy here?"

"I seem to be bearing up nobly." The game, friendly smile!

Impulsively, he snatched her to his heart and held her there while he kissed her again and again.

Old Ella spoke to them from the doorway. "It's the telephone, Master David. Your father—" Old Ella, beaming; unconscious of the threatened tragedy back of those words.

Feebly reassuring herself during his absence, which seemed an hour, Rose tried to believe that David's father would understand.

David came back presently. His step was slow. His eyes told the worst. Then he grinned again, though she sensed his nervousness and unhappiness.

"You've probably gathered, by now, that I'm *persona non grata* with my father—and that goes for you, too. Well, what of it? We'll have a house of our own, Rose, what do you say? The cosiest in New York—"

"Dave!" She sprang up, ran to him, threw her arms about him.

"Pretty eyes, Rose—" he smiled down, but there were grim lines in his face now. "Beautiful eyes. I've got to look out or I'll be falling in love with you—"

THEY had a home of their own; the prettiest apartment in Washington Square. On the top floor of a fine old building that overlooked the little park. It took a lot of Rose's dollars, and every day David said, "I'll pay it all back some day, beautiful. Ten times the amount! This scheme I've worked out for the new passenger route —why, say! There's nothing to it. Ask me—am I stepping along with my little old plane?"

It was true. David Marsh had made a name for himself in aviation. The daring aviator whose recklessness appalled the public and won them to him. David was doing what he wanted to do.

He loved it. Given his own way, he beamed on every one, sang through the days, squandered Rose's money on his projects and schemes, always with the conviction that some day, as his father's only heir, he would repay it all lavishly.

He took Rose about town and they had rapturous times together. She shared his gay moments, his moods of discouragement; listened to his troubles and disappointments, advised him, encouraged him and increased his faith in himself until he felt he could achieve anything.

Only a few months had passed when David contracted pneumonia. It seemed to bring them closer together, that illness. Rose sat beside him day and

night, sleepless, terrified. It was a desperate battle, but he lived.

His father came once to see him when Rose telephoned that the danger was very great. He stalked in and out like a man of stone, refusing to recognize Rose—a pathetic figure, crushed by his own blindness.

When David could, they sailed for Bermuda and there lived an unforgetable month. At least for Rose it was paradise. With David leaning on her for strength and encouragement, clinging to her in this new helplessness. You learn to depend on people at times like that.

It seemed sometimes that heaven must be just around the corner, that Dave really loved her now. Every hour of the day, Rose watched for signs; hungrily, anxiously. Had the miracle happened? Had he learned to care? You could never tell with David. That funny grin of his, the things he said—belying emotion or sentiment.

AND now the knowledge that her fortune was fast dwindling under the terrific expense grew to be a haunting terror to Rose. She had never told David the amount of money her father had left her. Money meant nothing to David, except where it satisfied his wants. With the thought in mind that ultimately he could more than repay her, he spent lavishly, bought as he pleased.

Rose knew her money alone had brought about the marriage. And daily, this growing fear undermined the shadow of happiness she had achieved. She counted the days and weeks until discovery would be certain—until she would have to confess, and all the time she clung to the hope of winning David's love.

And then the thing she had secretly feared from the beginning really happened.

Georgia came to call. A Georgia as radiant and lovely as a remembered dream. "Yes—really, it's Georgia!" And she caught Rose close in an affectionate embrace and kissed her soundly. "I've come to spend a month in New York as a birthday gift from dad. He does relent occasionally. And the first thing I thought of after I registered was you. Though I don't know why I should. You're the world's worst correspondent. One stingy little note since your marriage—" And then breathlessly, "David, how is he?"

Just a trace of breathlessness in the voice, a sudden anxious widening of the pretty eyes. She drew off a soft gray hat that fitted over her smooth dark hair with exquisiteness of line. Her frock was gray, diaphanous, clinging, made to suit the charm of her figure.

An ominous warning sounded like a knell through Rose's thoughts. Yet she loved Georgia.

But Georgia had not forgotten another day, another's victory. "You *are* cosy here, aren't you?" She wandered through the rooms, exclaiming over pretty trifles, silent now and then. She paused before a picture of David in a large leather frame.

"He hasn't changed—no, not at all. I heard just last week of his terrible illness. Tell me, Rose, he's all right again?"

So that had brought Georgia.

At Rose's nod and murmured word, Georgia brought herself up sharply. But love had given Rose a keen understanding.

Georgia seated herself, lighted a cigarette and sat back wearily. "I've wanted to see you for months. I missed you, Rose. The thrill of your experi-

ence threw a glamour over Barrytown, and then your elopement. My dear, I hadn't an idea that you and David cared for each other. It was a shock—but I was happy for you."

Rose said, eyes on the spring sky out beyond, "You were kind to me, Georgia. I've never forgotten. You gave me courage."

"Nonsense, darling! I was fond of you. I've always been. And you do the most unexpected things, and the most startling things happen to you! I was saying to Cricket this morning—"

"Cricket?" Rose leaned forward with a sudden pleased smile.

"Yes. He lives here, you know. He always has, in fact. As a gesture of respect to the family, he met me this morning at the train and saw that I was comfortably settled at my hotel."

Rose shook her head playfully. "Not so much to the *family*—"

"Silly!" laughed Georgia. "You know he's always been mad over you."

Rose flushed. "That's absurd. Cricket knew me only slightly. No man can fall in love with a woman so violently in just a day or two."

"WHAT'S this?" demanded a voice behind her. David! Then—"If the light weren't in my eyes, I'd say that was Georgia Hoyt sitting over there!" His broad, gay laugh echoed through the room as he went toward her.

"The light isn't in mine," came Georgia's light laugh, but her voice trembled. "It's you, David. How is the brave eagle?" She rose, moved forward a little, and they stood facing each other, smiling.

"Surprise—surprise!" He turned to Rose with a bewildered shrug. "And now, what was the remark I overheard as I came in—about no man falling in love with a woman so violently in a day or two?"

"I was just telling Rose," put in Georgia carelessly, "something she must have known for ages—that Cricket Hearth is and always was crazy about her."

"I'll bash in his head!" snarled Dave, pushing back his cuffs with a fierce gesture while his eyes danced. His riotous laughter was like a knife through Rose. And Georgia's high trill of merriment carried in its confident measures an exultancy that Rose recognized. Or was she imagining it? Was it born of this new terror?

Georgia knew now. Dave didn't really love the girl he had married.

It was the beginning of an era when Georgia called up daily, carried Rose off to lunch or the theater, dropped in to tea, made up dinner parties that always included the Marshes, and proved herself so delightful and stimulating that Rose tried to convince herself these fears of hers were groundless.

But little unguarded moments would betray Georgia—little unguarded moments when her glance wandered to David, as a hungry child peers through a bakery window.

CHAPTER IX

THE telephone rang in the David Marsh apartment toward four on an afternoon in May.

Three times it rang before Rose reached for it. "I won't be in until late to-night," came David's brisk voice. There was no excuse. He did as he pleased. She did the same. She had not been led to expect confidences.

"Thanks for calling, Dave." She always said that. With a smile in her voice, no matter how it hurt. "Did

Maybury's plane get back from St. Louis?"

"Not yet. They've sighted him over Pennsylvania. Lord, what a relief!"

"Oh, Dave, be careful!" she could not help saying. Planes crashed every day. There was always the horrible thought—suspense, fear.

He laughed. "Birds gotta fly. Well, so long!"

She hung up the receiver, sat back thoughtfully. Three nights this week already, and now the fourth. Dave was tied up with something that interested him, so he said. Georgia.

She laughed, trying to make herself believe that she didn't care. She hummed softly to herself. Oh, well, she had walked into it with her eyes open. He had made no promises, demanded none.

Dusk— For over a week now, Georgia had not appeared. Rose understood. Dave was with Georgia now, probably. Mechanically, she lighted the little alcohol lamp under the kettle. Sometimes people dropped in to tea.

But the guest who came to-day scarcely proved an unguent for the wound in Rose's heart. Clara Polk was a distant cousin of Dave's father—the poor branch of the Marsh family. Clara was a gossip—a trouble-maker and tale carrier.

"My dear," she began, "I simply had to come and see you, though you haven't returned my calls. I wondered if you knew that Louise is announcing her engagement to-night. There's quite a party. Isn't it a shame you can't go! They have the nicest people there."

"What are you wearing, Cousin Clara?" Rose asked, a flicker of amusement in her eyes.

Cousin Clara bristled. "I'm not going! When Louise Marsh's mother decides to apologize to me for her cheap behavior—well, I may consider attending some of their parties. Roland Marsh is my own cousin, and how he ever married such a virago—" She shook her head woefully. "His daughter Laura is lovely, though. She and David used to be such chums. I wouldn't be surprised if David would drop in at the party to-night."

Rose winced. Would David do that?

"Of course, David and his father are awfully stubborn, and neither will give in. His father will be there, I suppose, so David wouldn't go. You know, there's talk going around about you."

"Me?"

"Yes. It seems that Mrs. Somerset of Barrytown wrote Dave's father about your background. I was so surprised. Rose, I never would have dreamed it! You seem so—"

"HAVE you seen the new gallery on Fifty-Ninth Street?" put in Rose quietly. "There was an exhibit there last week—"

"Oh, now, Rose! I didn't mean to hurt your feelings! You mustn't be so touchy. I'm your friend. We can talk these things over. It does people good to talk things over. You need some one, Rose—" Clara edged forward in her chair, her eyes sparkling with delight at the prospect of this new bit of gossip she was about to divulge. "There's talk that you and David are unhappy." She folded her hands significantly, narrowed her eyes.

Rose's lazy smile dismissed the subject. "More tea, Cousin Clara?"

"I won't be put off the subject," Clara persisted. "If you don't know about it, you ought to. Your husband is running around with another woman, and she pretends to be a friend of yours. They're seen everywhere to-

gether. She's that bold— She's from the West, and her name is Hoyt, Georgia Hoyt."

Rose put her cup down sharply. Even the secret conviction that this thing existed had not hurt like hearing it from Clara's lips. It was like a blow across the cheek.

"There!" said Clara, with relish. "I knew it! I knew you were in the dark. But this is an outrage! The way you've stood by that man, day in and day out, and him risking his life in those planes and spending your money like a drunken sailor, and—"

"Please, Cousin Clara, don't jump at conclusions. Georgia and David are friends. They've known each other a long time."

"You can't cover up his failings any longer, Rose. I know David. He wants one thing one minute, and something entirely different the next. He was spoiled from a child. I think it's a crime! What if there isn't blue blood in your veins? You're a good, true woman!"

Somehow, Rose got rid of her at last. Long after she had gone, Rose sat in the candlelight beside the window. The stars came out, brilliants pinned on the purple heavens. Mockingly beautiful.

Georgia— She knew the sting of it, too. It had beaten her, triumphed over her smooth exterior, demanded recognition. She had grown reckless. Perhaps if David had married Georgia, his father, by now, would have relented and received his son on David's own terms. Now, he never would forgive Dave for marrying Rose Barker, Pindy Barker's daughter.

She paced through the rooms, trying to make herself face the thing sanely. She had not lost him, because she had never possessed him. He was standing by because he was sorry for her. David— She threw herself full length on a sofa before the fire and clutched at eyes that burned and stung with tears. The last thread was gone—the last thin thread that held him. But he didn't know. If only she could stave off the discovery a little longer—

FAR into the night she waited, while the candles burned low and the fire went out and a chill settled on the room. A distant station played dance music, and some one was singing. She listened vaguely.

She still wore the soft blue tea gown she had chosen, anticipating his return at dusk. David—and Georgia— Together somewhere. Dancing, probably. Laughing into each other's eyes, thrilled with their secret, finding in those stolen hours a sweetness that nothing else could offer. Did he kiss her, hold her to his heart, whisper words to her that Rose had never heard from him? Was he sentimental now, helpless under the chains that had held Rose so long?

A voice singing in hushed tones from that distant station:

"None but the lonely heart
Can know my sadness—"

"It's chilly here," came Dave's voice as the song finished. The candles sputtered low in the sockets, the pale pink ashes stirred in the fireplace. Rose sat, a pale blur beside the window. "Did you fall asleep?" asked Dave, irritably.

"No."

"Alone all evening?" A shadow of guilt in the question.

"Yes—but Clara Polk came to tea."

"What's that old maid doing around here so much?" he growled.

"She's your cousin, Dave." Rose's voice was cool, unruffled. In the dark

hours she had fought her battle. The fire burned low in her heart.

"Yes—and not a particular favorite, either. She's a gossip. What was she telling you?"

Rose shivered a little, reached for the white silk shawl that had dropped at her feet. "It would only annoy you. Just—gossip." She did not meet his eyes directly, fussed with the silk folds that she drew about her shoulders.

"Sure!" he snapped. He strode to the window. "I'll find a way to keep that busybody out of here. She was always a menace."

"Menace?" repeated Rose. "What possible information could she have in her possession that could prove a menace to—us?"

His head went back sharply. "I hate gossips!"

He stood with his back to her looking down into the Square.

Restless, irritated—a caged animal would pace that way, snap and snarl at the obstacle in its path. She had served her purpose now, given him his chance at the life he loved.

"You're fired, understand?" he stormed

He turned abruptly. "Why don't you go out more, Rose? I always have the feeling that you're sitting here waiting—waiting—God!" He paced back and forth beating his hands together. "Rose, you're not human. No woman could go on—" He caught himself sharply, colored, shrugged. "I'm going to bed!"

She blew out the candles one by one, after a while, and made her way blindly down the hall to her room.

EARLY in the morning she heard David leave the apartment. He hadn't said good-by. Perhaps it was just as well. She would have had to admit things, confess the truth of her circumstances. It was over. David—David—

A few hours later the maid admitted a caller. Rose could hear them in the outer hall from her chair before the fire where her breakfast was laid. She turned, prepared for Clara Polk. It was Georgia standing in the doorway, her white face a mask of wretchedness and fear.

"Yes, I've come, Rose!"

"*Georgia!*" whispered Rose.

"Don't look at me like that," begged Georgia. "You've heard, I know. You must have heard." She spoke rapidly, breathlessly, hands clenched in a knot before her. She had not slept, her dark, wild eyes told that.

"We've been together daily—we had to see each other. Rose, you've got to understand. You've got—to—*free* him!"

"Sit down, Georgia," Rose heard herself say. "Let's be sensible."

"You *would* say that—let's be sensible!" cried Georgia, covering her eyes with her hands. "I've come here to ask you to release your husband—and you say that!"

"You're hysterical, Georgia." Rose spoke quietly, but things grew black and writhed before her.

"I'm not, I mean what I say!' cried Georgia. "I've stood this thing as long as I can, and now—"

"I've stood a few things, myself," Rose reminded her.

"It's your own fault! You walked into it with your eyes wide open. You can't blame Dave. It was a matter-of-fact proposition. You wanted him. He needed your money to get a start. There it is!"

The truth shouldn't hurt, but it did. The truth that slit through her heart like a smooth, sharp knife. David—David— Had it never grown to mean more than that to him? Had those tender, gentle moments, when other things had been ruled out and only the warm, sweet atmosphere of home dominated, meant nothing to him but interludes to be forgotten?

How about the time he had so narrowly escaped death from pneumonia? Day and night beside his bed, praying, keeping him alive by the sheer force of her will, clinging to hope with a tenacity that even God must have pitied?

And that convalescence—four glorious weeks in Bermuda. She and Dave driving leisurely along broad white roads in a funny little phaeton, and Dave singing some silly song in a voice still weak, and laughing into her eyes with honest comradeship. Perhaps not love—

There had been moments—hours. Fragments of happiness. Crumbs from the banquet of life. Had she foolishly thought them the feast? Had she deluded her hungry heart into thinking it had eaten its fill—when crumbs had but dulled the edge of that terrible hunger?

"DID David tell you that?" she asked Georgia then.

"Well—not exactly. I figured it out. But he *has* admitted that he never loved you, Rose."

Rose smiled, nodded—biting her lips, clasping one hand alternately in the other. The hour had struck. No longer any use to hope. Good-by, little dreams! Good-by, little hopes! Good-by, mirage of happiness! Good-by, David—my husband, my life!—

"If he loved you," Georgia said in a low voice, "I wouldn't come to you now, Rose. But he doesn't—he never has. And it's cruel to hold a man when he wants some one else. You're holding him because you bought his promise—"

"No!" cried Rose, one hand against her eyes. "You can't say that—you mustn't say that to me, Georgia. He asked me to marry him—urged me, and I agreed against my better judgment."

Georgia's harsh laugh. "Your better judgment! Weren't you just aching to marry him?"

"Yes," slowly, wearily.

"Then, why bring in judgment?" demanded Georgia.

A pause. "Perhaps you're right, Georgia. I shouldn't. You see, I loved him, and—judgment didn't count."

"It was a shabby trick!" Georgia had lost all reticence now. Breathless, confident of success, she went on: "You let him get caught in the trap that circumstance set. You knew he didn't love you. You know he never has—and there's Cricket!" Her eyes lighted suddenly.

And after a sulky pause: "Dave realizes now that he always loved me—back there, with all of us tangled up in silly problems and conditions. None of us took anything seriously—"

Rose stared at her dully. "He told you—that?"

Georgia nodded. "Do you think he would confess his love for me if he cared for you—if he ever had? Do you think we would spend evening after evening together, stealing our happiness — if we didn't love each other?"

She stood across the room, eyes blazing with challenge, facing the adversary that Rose had become; Rose, gentle, calm, with a terrible smile on her lips. Rose Barker. The girl from beyond the bridge in Barrytown. She possessed something now that Georgia Hoyt envied. The tables were turned.

"Don't—*don't* stare at me like that! I know what you're thinking. You're saying to yourself: 'I saved her from death—and she's doing this thing to me. She's taking my husband away from me—'"

"Stop!" said Rose, with a commanding gesture. "You owe me nothing for that. I would have saved a kitten from drowning. Because it happened to be you doesn't matter. That has no bearing on this."

"YOU say that, but you're thinking otherwise." Georgia threw back her head, locked her hands at her throat. "Oh, my Lord! Why couldn't my father have been more generous? Why didn't Dave tell me then? I could have coaxed some out of father, probably. Every one knew how close he was with me." Angry tears blinded her.

But Rose was laughing—laughter that rose to a dreadful *crescendo*. "You've won, Georgia. The chains can't hold him any longer."

"Rose—Rose—" cried Georgia, suddenly changed, appalled by the thing she had done, "what have I said to you? What have I done? This thing—it tortures me so—this fear that Dave and I— Oh, Rose, if you love him as I do, I'm sorry for you. But I can't give him up. I—*can't!*"

"Why should you, Georgia?" Rose was quiet now, resigned at last. "He loves you—you love him. I never counted." She laughed softly. "There just wasn't any use. It's—over—" She stood looking out at the spring sunshine, out into the Square where children romped and frolicked. Children. "It's over," she said again. "I'll go away. I never held Dave, you know. His life is his own."

"Of course, even if the divorce goes through right away," said Georgia, bristling with plans already, "we won't

be married for a couple of years, because my father will have to be won over. He's a little old-fashioned, you know. And—my money can't be touched until I'm twenty-five. Grandmother left it that way. Dave wouldn't be able to swing it, alone. Of course, if he broke up with you, his father would probably relent and take David on again. And—"

"Please, Georgia—if you don't mind, we won't talk about it any more."

"I'll go!" Georgia decided at once. "I shouldn't have stayed. I'm a fool—I don't know what I'm doing—" And impulsively, she laid a hand on Rose's arm. "Don't be hard on me, Rose. Sometimes, we *have* to do things. Don't you—understand?"

"Yes."

"Good-by, Rose!" Georgia's hand clasped hers, suddenly! Georgia's wet cheek dropped for a moment to her own. "I wish it didn't have to be you!"

Rose watched the retreating figure, heard the door close. Then drunkenly she made her way across the room and dropped to her knees at the chair before the fire. "Golden chains!" She laughed, laughed until tears ran unheeded down her cheeks—mad, devastating tears.

"And I haven't a penny to my name!"

CHAPTER X.

SHE said good-by that day to the home they had shared together.

Good-by— Little intimate hours, little heart-breaking hours, sweet interlude—good-by!

With lifeless steps she made her way down the long stairs to the street.

She spent a week trying to find work, a week in which she ate seldom and slept little. A week haunted with memories that sent her plunging through the streets in the dark hours, praying for release from the loneliness, the longing for David.

And then she found a job in a big accounting firm. Because it demanded concentration, she threw herself into the work and bent every effort toward making a success of it.

A morning came when Mr. Staley strolled through the office and looked over the girls.

"Some one has made a mistake of four thousand dollars!" he thundered. "The initials are R. B. Who is it?"

Rose left her desk and came forward. Her white face caught a sunbeam directly across it. "It's probably mine," she said. "I'm terribly sorry."

"How long have you been here?" he snapped.

"About three weeks."

"Long enough to know better. I'd like to know what Miss Trench is thinking of—employing a rattle-brained flapper, and then entrusting Laden's account to her!" He addressed the room, his booming voice reaching to every corner. "He's important and influential, and here I have a letter from him this morning that must have set the post office on fire. Always have to handle him with kid gloves—say, is this your first job?" he asked Rose.

"No. For several years I—I worked in a firm in the Middle West."

"Why didn't you stay there? Well, you can go back, for all of me. You're fired, understand? And don't touch another figure."

He turned and stormed from the room.

"It's a dirty shame!" "He's a brute!" "We all make mistakes!"

Phrases like that circling round her head in sibilant whispers. Rose struggled with tears of humiliation—terror. It had taken a week to find this job, and she was on the thinnest ice, financially, that she had ever known.

"Good-by, all!"

She waved at them, smiled gamely, and left. Not until she reached her locker did she realize that she had never touched Laden's account! There was a girl named Rita Blaine in the same office, and she had come only the week before. A little, dark-eyed widow who was struggling to care for her baby. Rose didn't even hesitate. She collected the remaining pay that was due her and left.

The elevator swooped down to the street floor. She stepped out, nodded at the pleasant boy who always had a cheery greeting for her, turned away—and ran directly into Cricket Hearth. He was rushing along, about to leap into the elevator, and he came to an abrupt stop.

"Rose!—" That first whispered word. Then his hand shot out. "Hooray—and several hoorays! If this isn't luck!"

SHE realized, after the first startled moment, that Cricket was still holding her hand, and she drew it away and smiled at him in friendly surprise.

"Why—I couldn't believe—"

"Neither could I. Rose—"

They stared at each other like two children.

"We're blocking traffic," she reminded him at last.

"Not we—but you. Haven't you always blocked traffic—with those eyes?" He smiled down at her with the old fondness, and slipped a hand through her arm. "You may not know it, but you're bound for lunch with a hungry man—and don't say you have a previous engagement."

She went along, unprotesting. What vagary of fate had achieved this? Never had she needed Cricket's friendly smile as she did this moment.

"I hope your husband won't mind, Rose."

"Then—you haven't heard?" she tried to say easily, because she must treat the situation casually in order to survive. She just couldn't stand people's pity.

"Heard?" he repeated, and piloted her toward a taxicab.

"About Dave—and me," she told him.

"Oh—*much*, about Dave and you," he said, not without bitterness. "But your remark savors of serious things." He was trying to be gay and his eyes betrayed him.

"The experiment didn't work, Cricket. It's over. It isn't Dave and me any more. It's just—me. And now, where are you taking me to lunch? The cab's headed toward Park Avenue and I'm absolutely shabby!"

"You're absolutely ravishing!" he corrected. "And your idea of direction is perfect. I hope to tease your appetite with a piquant dish I discovered the other day—"

That sort of talk. And all the time, Cricket's eyes devouring her beauty, her charm, her gay, brave smiles.

Over *Minestra del Paradiso*, which Cricket shamelessly declared was most appropriate for the occasion— "What could be better than paradise soup today of all days?" Rose watched him as in a dream, lost in a haze of memory and in the dreamy pleasure of the present. If it had been Cricket that she had loved, how simple it might have all been.

For Cricket had loved her—*had* loved her— The innocent little verb kept beating a tom-tom above the music—a taunting *obbligato*. He loved her still, and she knew it. The dark ecstasy in Cricket's honest eyes betrayed him hopelessly.

"As an old family friend," he said at last, when patience deserted him, and only the great longing for her remained, "I would appreciate a few enlightening facts. Am I to understand that the devoted husband has faded from the picture?"

Rose buttered the tip of a roll, munched it with apparent relish. "Dave has faded from the picture," she said to him, wondering how she could speak like this, smile like this, while her heart was breaking! "He was never the devoted husband, Cricket, but he was a gentleman and—faithful to me in his fashion." She smiled thoughtfully. "After all, what more could one ask?"

"Nothing, if the present arrangement satisfies you, Rose." He leaned toward her a little, searched her eyes.

SHE shrugged, shook her head, faced him again. "Satisfy is a stuffy word, Cricket. You aren't satisfied on mountain tops or down in the valley. You know either a great ecstasy or a great pain—"

"Seeing you unhappy like this," he began bitterly, and broke off. "Rose, it isn't fair!"

"Everything is fair in love and war, as the old bromide has it, Cricket."

"Love?" he repeated, piercing the light remark with the swift, sure rapier of his understanding.

Tears blinded her. She dropped her weary head against spread palms.

"You know. You understand. I can't hide it, can I? He didn't love me, Cricket—ever. I hoped he would. I waited and prayed and promised myself it would happen—it *must* happen. But there wasn't any use. It's—over—"

"Some one else?" asked Cricket, avoiding her eyes as he lit a cigarette.

Glancing up, she saw by the strange, pitying smile that he knew. "She's told you—Georgia's told you—"

"She didn't need to, Rose. Other people did, and I've met them together a few times. I've been tempted to go to you, but—a fellow can't strike up the band when there's death on the street. I knew how you cared for Dave. I've always known—"

She threw out helpless hands, smiled through blurred eyes, bit her lip in the old childish way. "Oh, well, it isn't any sin, loving, is it, Cricket?"

"Then you'll forgive me for mine?" he begged, and caught a restless hand and held it firmly.

"You do love me, Cricket, don't you?" She liked to say those words, to see the answering smile in his eyes. Dear, kind Cricket, the soul of honor, the salt of the earth. She glanced down at their hands locked together. "I rather thought it was all over—your loving me—"

"It will never be over, Rose."

"It would be so nice," she said wistfully, "to have you for a friend, Cricket. But I can't very well when you love me—like this—"

"You can always have me for a friend—don't you understand? Wouldn't it be better for you to have David for a friend than—"

"No—no!" she cried thickly. "Not—David!" And her eyes were dark now with hunger and an old loneliness. David—a friend— Never to know the touch of his lips, his arms about her again; never to feel his cheek against her cheek. Never to sit before

the fire with him, hear his laughter—or his pain; to listen to his plans and hopes, his sudden, devastating discouragements, his tales of achievement—

"THEN, Rose, you need a friend. Let me be one, won't you? I promise not to love you any more than I can decently help, and likewise promise never to mention it to you."

"But your eyes, Cricket!— It hurts seeing you care."

"Rose, dear, you know how cruel people can be to those who love them. Don't be cruel to me. Give me a chance. If it doesn't work on the basis of friendship, I promise to disappear."

"I promise! C r i c k e t—" came abruptly, "will you help me get a job? I've got to have one right away."

He laughed amusedly, opened his cigarette case with a lazy gesture. "You will have your little joke, I suppose."

"I'm serious, Cricket. But I swear you to secrecy. No one must know that I'm working—*ever*. Understand?"

"After this game, we'll try parchesi." His indulgent smile yielded to any whim.

"Cricket, I'm absolutely stone broke. I haven't a cent in the world but this!" And she emptied the contents of her purse on the table before them.

He frowned anxiously. "By Jove—I believe you're serious!"

She nodded. "I had a job and they let me go this morning. There was some mix up. It promised to be good, too. I felt at first that I just couldn't bear it."

"What happened?" sharply.

She explained. He forced the details from her, covered her hand with his on the table. "Rose, you must have an awful lot of happiness in store for you—"

She shrugged off his words, nervous and apprehensive about her future. "Don't let's talk about that, Cricket. The problem now is, I've got to have a job. Do you know people who employ girls and pay money?"

"Some—" he grinned.

"Cricket, if you love me, finesse things, won't you? I'll work hard and honestly."

"Rose!" His voice was stern. "You've spent all that money on David Marsh?"

"Cricket—" she laughed shakily, "for a few thousand dollars I bought a key to heaven. And now—I've lost the key. Let's not talk about it any more. It was such a little price I paid."

He stared off whitely toward the open window beyond. "And he thought so little of you as that!"

"He doesn't know! He doesn't dream that I've exhausted my resources. He thinks my fortune was infinitely larger than it was. Perhaps I cheated him. I let him go on thinking. He will be worth a lot of money some day. He knows it. He could borrow on the strength of that—and I knew that was all he ever considered it. A loan—"

Her voice trembled.

"Will you help me now, Cricket?" She reached blindly for his hand. "Will you help me get a job?"

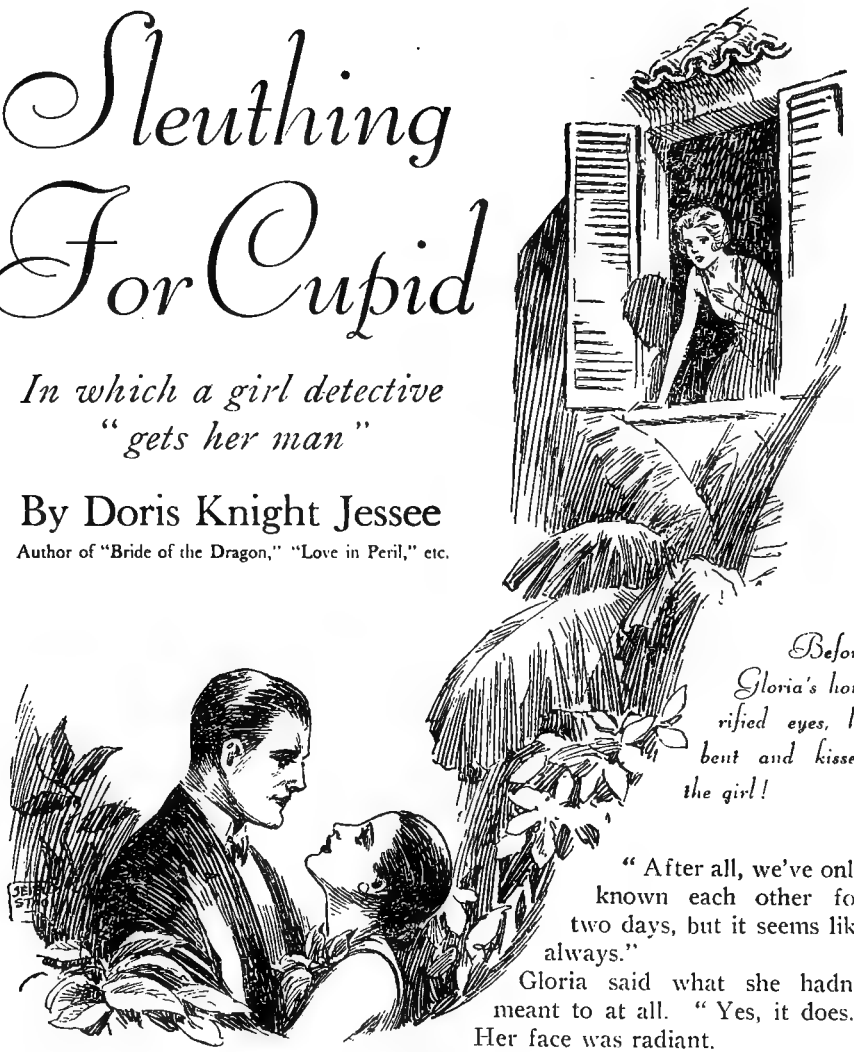
He grasped her hand hungrily. "I'll do my best, Rose."

Sleuthing For Cupid

In which a girl detective "gets her man"

By Doris Knight Jessee

Author of "Bride of the Dragon," "Love in Peril," etc.



Before Gloria's horrified eyes, he bent and kissed the girl!

"WHAT?" gasped Gloria Harmon. "I—I don't believe I heard what you said."

Her heart was thudding tumultuously. She laced her fingers together to stop their trembling. But she couldn't keep the quaver out of her voice.

"I know it sounds absurd." Martin's voice wasn't very steady either. "After all, we've only known each other for two days, but it seems like always."

Gloria said what she hadn't meant to at all. "Yes, it does." Her face was radiant.

"You—" Martin didn't finish his sentence. His gaze met Gloria's and there didn't seem to be any further need for words. He caught her close in his arms. His lips sought hers in a kiss that seemingly held all the bliss there was in life.

"Then you *will*—marry me?" he whispered after a while. "That was what I asked you, when you said you

didn't hear. But you did hear, didn't you, dear?"

His dark eyes were looking deep into hers. There was such love-hunger in them that Gloria wanted to cry for sheer happiness.

"I heard," she answered, brushing away a tear. "But—it didn't seem possible that you could care in the same, illogical, unreasoning, mad way that I—I love you!"

"Gloria!" Again he swept her into his embrace, kissing her until she was breathless. "Let's be married to-morrow," he said—and went on kissing her some more.

"Perhaps," Gloria agreed dreamily.

Then, all at once, she remembered. Reluctantly she slipped out of the circle of his arms.

"Why so far away?" grinned Martin.

She smiled back at him. "Because I want to talk."

"Can't you talk just as well here?" Martin's hands were grasping her shoulders.

She shook her head. "No, please, Martin. This is serious. I'd forgotten for a moment. But I came to San Juan on a mission. I've got to fulfill that before I can think of marriage."

"A mission?" Martin asked slowly.

"Yes. It's a secret. But I'll tell you. I don't intend to have any secrets from my—husband!"

At that, Martin hugged her close once more. "Gosh, honey, say that again. It sounds great!"

GLORIA nestled in the haven of his arms, content to stay there forever. The setting was perfect, too! A moon was riding low in the sky. It sent a path of glimmering radiance straight to them.

There was a little warm breeze. The stars were so close—stars in the tropics have a way of seeming near enough to touch—and the sky was so blue.

Behind them was a stretch of sandy beach, then the Condado hotel with its lights. The distant strains of an orchestra came fitfully to them, borne by the warm little breeze. And there was an undercurrent of the rhythmic music of the waves.

"Now, what's all this mysterious mission, dearest?" Martin asked.

She sighed. It seemed a shame to break the spell of this magical hour with explanations about stupid things like business. "It isn't at all mysterious, really," she answered. "It's just—"

Some one coughed. Hastily Gloria stepped away from Martin, and began fixing her hair—just as girls have done from time immemorial.

"Begging your pardon—a *telegrafista* for the *señorita,*" said an apologetic voice. "*Señora* Worthington said I might find you here. Sorry if I intrude."

"Here!" Martin cut short the bellhop's apologies with a coin. The fellow bowed.

"Thank you; *señor!*" He went back across the sand.

Gloria reluctantly took the envelope from Martin. It was a radio message. The moonlight was strong enough to show the big red lettering across the top of the envelope. That meant—orders.

She sighed. If only this trip to Porto Rico had been one of mere pleasure, how perfect it would have been!

"I'm sorry," she said, "but this may be important. Do you mind if I go back to the hotel and read the message? It won't take long."

"It had better not!" Martin tilted

her chin with his forefinger and kissed her. "I can't spare you more than a minute at the longest. Just think of all we've got to talk about! Why, it's going to take from now to doomsday to tell all the interesting things that have happened to both of us—before we met each other."

THEY were walking back across the short stretch of sandy beach, their feet sinking deep into the sand with every step. Perhaps that is why Martin had to cling so tightly to Gloria's arm as they went along. At least, that was as good an excuse as any.

From the beach they entered a little garden, full of trees and palms, with tiny winding paths leading to the hotel. The moon came in a dappled pattern through the leaves. A breeze stirred the branches.

"I'll never forget this blessed evening," Gloria said in a low tone. Afterward, she was to think of that sentence.

"Nor I!" Martin had her hands in both of his. He bent and laid his lips in a bracelet of tender caresses about each of her slender wrists.

They came to the big curving driveway which led to the hotel entrance and went in.

Gloria wished suddenly that they had stayed on the beach. She felt a presentiment of evil; try as she would, she could not shrug it aside. She told herself that she was being silly, absurd; but the sensation of approaching unhappiness persisted.

In the lobby she asked Martin to excuse her while she read the wireless message. It was a long one. She read the words over once, without their making sense.

Again she read them; this time her mind whirled about in a mad circle of misery. Intuition had not been at fault. Her world crashed about her feet. Sorrow came where wild joy had been such a short time before.

Martin—her Martin—

But, after all, what did she know of him? Merely a big tall chap with merry brown eyes, a diffident way of speaking and a charming manner. She had met him at the pool early that morning. There hadn't even been any one to introduce them. She had collided violently with him as he came out of the bathhouse door. They had each murmured: "Sorry." Then Gloria had dropped her bathing cap and both stooped to recover it. Their heads bumped smartly. After that, there hadn't been any more formality. They had laughed, told each other their names—and then dived into the cool green depths of the inviting pool.

WHAT a merry day that had been! They had luncheon together at Gloria's table, and dinner together at Martin's. With an afternoon spent in wandering about the picturesque town of San Juan. In the evening they went to the picture show in Santurce and smiled over the titles put in to help make the talking pictures intelligible to a Spanish-speaking people.

It wasn't until the next day that Gloria began to suspect this love-at-first-sight stuff wasn't such a myth as she had always thought. She was gloriously happy. Happier than she could ever remember being in all her twenty-one years. She couldn't understand why the simplest happenings were clothed in a cloak of magical interest. She only knew that she was radiantly content to spend every minute of the day with Martin.

In the evening there was a dance.

The orchestra from the steamship San Lorenzo, then in port, furnished the music.

Martin and Gloria danced, and Gloria's heart thudded so madly that she hoped Martin couldn't hear. His steps were exactly suited to hers. They glided about, like one person, impelled by the lilting rhythm of the music—thrilling to each other's nearness. Martin danced with no one else; paid heed to no other girl.

More and more, Gloria became aware that the love she had been waiting for all her life, had come to her at last. In love, and with a man concerning whom she knew nothing; save that he had a soft, slurring way of saying his words that was enchanting! In love—with a man she had known but two short days!

She tried to tell herself that she was acting like a silly child. Of course, she didn't love him. The very idea! And all the time, her pulses were pounding like mad, and her breath caught in her throat.

About ten, Martin had suggested that they walk along the sandy beach that gleamed so invitingly in the moonglow. Everything had been so lovely—so perfect. Gloria hadn't consciously thought. She had drifted along on the tide of her feeling. Until Martin had spoken his love. Then it was that she realized how much this stranger had come to mean—

"BAD news, dear?" His voice came to her caressingly. Gloria shut her teeth sharply for a second before she replied. That endearment was almost too much. Tears were stinging the backs of her eyes.

"Not—not anything unpleasant," she faltered, trying to make her stiff lips smile.

She folded the wireless and thrust it back into the envelope. Despite her efforts to seem calm, her fingers persisted in trembling. The envelope fluttered from her grasp and fell to the floor.

Martin's laugh rang out. "Like old times, isn't it?" he said, as they both stooped to pick up the truant envelope. This time Martin was the quicker. He handed her the slip of white paper that had spelled the death knell to Gloria's happiness. But first Gloria saw him dart a sharp look at the envelope, as if to impress it upon his memory.

"Old times," echoed Gloria mechanically. Inwardly she was thinking: "This can't be real. Martin must be true and fine. I couldn't be so mistaken. I couldn't!"

But she had been mistaken. The proof was in the wireless message she was clutching till her fingers ached. Proof that Martin was unworthy of the love she had given him. Written there, in that message. She sighed.

"I must send an answer to this," she added. Her words were seemingly uttered by a stranger.

A person couldn't feel so terribly, and yet go on talking as though nothing at all had occurred. Yet that was what she was doing—

"I don't mean to pry, but—did your wireless have anything to do with that mysterious mission you were going to tell me about?"

Martin was asking that! Gloria felt as though he had slapped her.

She pasted a smile on her lips. "No," she snapped.

THERE! The lie was out. And a brief moment before, she had been thinking that there must be no secrets separating them. Life was ironic.

"Shall I rouse up the fellow at the desk, so you can send your message?" Martin went on. Gloria took a moment to consider; all the time her heart felt like a dead weight in her breast.

"If you will, please," she answered at length.

"Things certainly stop early around here," Martin said cheerily, as they made their way across to the desk. "It can't be more than midnight, and the music's stopped playing and everybody gone home. I feel like Rip Van Winkle!"

Gloria made no reply. She took the blank the sleepy clerk pushed out, and poised the pencil above it. Rapidly she wrote: "Am well. Love," and signed her first name. She added the address in downtown New York and then pushed the paper over to Martin.

"See how many words that is," she said, hoping her tone didn't tremble as much as she thought it did.

"Nine!" said Martin promptly. Gloria couldn't detect even the least bit of agitation in his voice.

"Dave Harmon is my father," she said faintly.

"Hope he'll like me," rejoined Martin cheerily.

Gloria's last little feeble hope died. Martin must be an accomplished liar.

"He heads a detective bureau," she added deliberately. "A big detective bureau in New York."

She knew she was doing something her father wouldn't like. But she couldn't help that. She couldn't let Martin run his head into the noose without being warned—no matter how much of a villain he might be.

Martin kept on smiling in his charming, adoring way. "Now that you've got your message off, how about strolling on the beach a while longer?"

His fingers were touching her arm in the sweetly possessive manner he had. Again tears stung the backs of Gloria's eyes. Restraining the sobs made Gloria's throat ache.

"Sorry," she said. "It's late. I'll have to be turning in."

"Don't say you must go!" Martin spoke quickly. "Not one o'clock yet. Why that—that's early." He smiled at his own earnestness. Then, as Gloria shook her head: "This is the sort of magical night of dreams that comes but once. Don't make it end so soon. Please!"

HE caught her hand tight in his. Gloria felt a thrill go clear to her shoulder. How absurd! Couldn't she stop caring—now that she knew what this man really was? Yet such was the force of his pleading that she almost put duty behind her and stayed for another few moments.

"I'm sorry—but I must go." She thrust the wish away.

"One more kiss then, little sweetheart." Gloria shut her eyes. The touch of his masterful lips on hers was so sweet—"Good night, dear heart," he whispered. "Be down early tomorrow morning! I can hardly wait for day to come, so we can make plans for—our wedding."

"Yes, yes," answered Gloria wildly. She couldn't endure much more of this. The sobs were tearing at her throat.

Somehow she managed to gain the sanctuary of her room, though she couldn't remember going up in the elevator, nor fitting the key in the lock of her door.

Once inside, she groped her way to a big wicker chair facing the window. She sank down in that chair and cried bitterly. Wept until her throat rasped and her eyes were aching balls of fire. Martin—Martin—

After a long time, she wearily raised on one elbow and unrolled the crumpled ball of paper she had been clutching all the while. She reached over and turned on the light above the desk. The message remained the same. It was from her father, Dave Harmon, and it was written in code—a code which seemed like a simple inquiry concerning a stock deal but which she readily translated as:

> Martin Price is your man. His confederate is Paula Worthington. Both are desperate criminals. Be careful of them. Keep on friendly terms with the girl. Meet the man.

Meet the man! Gloria laughed aloud, a short brittle sound, devoid of mirth. She had met him, all right. Met and fallen in love with the man she had come to Porto Rico to track down.

What a joke—a monstrous, hideous joke! Martin Price wasn't even his real name, then. It was Edward Conway, and he had a police record. Another thought came to her.

On the ship coming down, she had shared her stateroom with a Mrs. Worthington. A charming girl, pretty and well dressed. Gloria had found Paula Worthington a delightful sailing companion, and they had both been delighted to find that they had the same destination in mind—the Condado.

Paula had insisted on paying for the car which took them to the hotel. She had been with Gloria constantly, that first day.

When Gloria had met Martin, Paula had disappeared. Gloria had laid this to tact on the part of her new-found friend. Now, she wasn't so sure.

Gloria drew a deep breath and sat up straight. She must put all this love nonsense out of her mind, and do the job she had come to Porto Rico to carry out. She mustn't fail her father now!

She turned out the light again, and sitting there in the dark, gazing out at the beauty of the tropical scene spread out before her, she tried to make her tired brain remember everything from the very first—

DAVE HARMON had built up his detective bureau from a humble beginning to one of the leading agencies in New York City. Next to his motherless daughter, Gloria, he loved that business more than anything in the world. When Gloria grew up and showed an aptitude for following in her father's footsteps, he was more than delighted.

For three years, now, she had been one of Dave Harmon's most successful agents. But he never assigned her to jobs where he thought there might be the slightest danger. That made Gloria just the least bit angry, for she craved adventure more than anything else in the world.

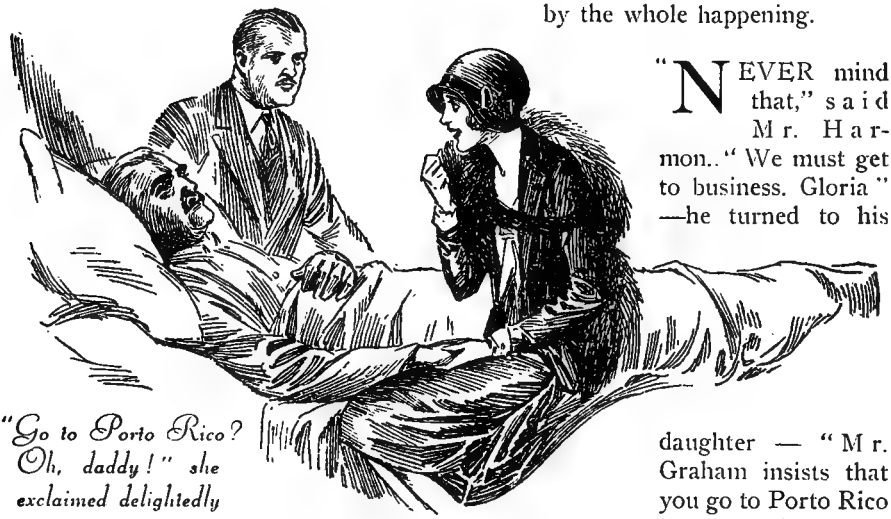
Several times, of late, she had met a Mr. George Graham coming out of the office and had taken an instant dislike to him. His was the unctuous, flattering type which Gloria detested. His close-set, greenish eyes always seemed to devour her blond beauty.

"Who is that man, daddy?" she asked one day.

Her father smiled. "He was just asking about you, dear. His name is George Graham, and he has a most interesting problem for me to solve. One that may take me to Porto Rico very shortly."

"I wish I were going," sighed Gloria, looking out at the midwinter rain pelting down. "I'd adore a tropical trip just now."

Her father patted her cheek. "I'm meeting Mr. Graham for luncheon uptown. We're to decide whether this trip will actually be necessary or not. I'll tell you all about it this afternoon."



"Go to Porto Rico? Oh, daddy!" she exclaimed delightedly

And her father did tell her—but the scene was not as he had expected. Instead of returning to the office after his conference with Mr. Graham, word came to Gloria that her father wanted her at home immediately.

When she arrived, all flushed and rosy from her hurry, she met a doctor going out, black bag in hand. She raced upstairs on flying feet and ran to the bed.

"Daddy darling!" she cried, throwing her arms around his neck.

"Don't fuss over me, child," reproved her father testily; but she knew that secretly he was delighted at her anxiety. "I'm all right, just a sprained ankle."

Then Gloria became aware that some one else was in the room. Mr. Graham came forward.

"Your father tripped over a valise, left most carelessly in the too-dark hall of my club. I feel that the whole thing was my fault, since I had insisted that he lunch there with me. Some one must pay for such carelessness!"

Plainly, Graham was upset by the whole happening.

"NEVER mind that," said Mr. Harmon. "We must get to business. Gloria"—he turned to his daughter—"Mr. Graham insists that you go to Porto Rico in my stead."

"Oh!" Gloria couldn't resist the little exclamation of pleasure.

"You are exactly the type to solve this mystery, I am sure, Miss Harmon," put in Mr. Graham. "Let me outline the case briefly, and then you can tell me if you would be interested."

Gloria nodded.

"A large number of counterfeit bills, in imitation of the new issue of tens, have been discovered in the Porto Rican section of Brooklyn. After much questioning, we discovered that the residents obtained the money from their home island."

"Why don't you go to the United States government with this?" Gloria interrupted. "As I see it, this is a Federal matter, not one for us to handle."

For a second the dark pupils of Mr. Graham's eyes dilated till they seem-

ingly blotted out all the greenish color. The next instant his eyes looked just the same as always, and Gloria wondered if she had imagined that the man was agitated.

"Exactly what your father asked, Miss Harmon," he exclaimed. "And this is why. I've a huge sugar plantation on the island, and a large number of these counterfeit bills have bobbed up among my workers. Since most of the poor fellows never have seen so much as ten dollars all at one time in their entire lives, you can see that something is decidedly wrong. But if I notify our government, I'm afraid they'll send sleuths down, who will scare my ignorant men and probably suspect all of them—and that would put an end to harvesting my crop this year. I can't risk that."

Mr. Graham paused a moment, then went on:

"Of course, the thing has to be stopped—but I think we can do that without Federal intervention. For example, no one would think of suspecting you, Miss Harmon. You could go to the island and stop at the Condado for a while, just like a regular tourist. Then later, say in four or five days, you could hire a car and go down to Ponce and Coamo Springs. That's a trip most travelers make. My plantation lies between those two towns. How about it, Miss Harmon? Want to tackle the venture?"

Of course, Gloria did!

AFTER Mr. Graham left, her father said slowly:

"Funny thing. I've been at work on this case for some time—even before Graham came to me. It was brought to my attention by a Porto Rican who was in a lot of trouble by having several bills in his possession. I cleared him, and I've been ferreting out facts about the case ever since. In my mind, it's centered down to a chap named Edward Conway. This fellow served five years in a Federal prison for being implicated in a counterfeiting ring. He was released about four months ago, and he immediately sailed for Porto Rico. Find him—and I'm sure you have the brains of this new gang."

"Does Mr. Graham know about this man, dad?" asked Gloria.

Mr. Harmon shook his head. "I believe in keeping my own counsel until the case is completed. But be careful of this Conway, Gloria. He's a slick customer, from all I've been able to discover. He looks like a gentleman and acts like one. That makes him all the more dangerous. If I can find out what name he's using, down on the island, I'll wireless you. 'By, dear—and good luck."

GOOD luck! Gloria pounded her little double fists together in an agony of indecision. She had deliberately warned Martin that she was the daughter of Dave Harmon. She had done that much for him, because of her love.

Now she must thrust love away and endeavor to hunt down Edward Conway—alias Martin Price—so that he might pay the penalty with another prison sentence.

She walked over to the open window and stood looking out. Few places in San Juan have glass in the windows, only shutters. The hotel was no exception. One of the shutters banged against the side of the house, stirred by the warm night breeze. Gloria leaned out to fasten this. As she did so she glanced down toward the winding driveway.

The waning moon, glinting through the feathery needles of Australian pines at one side of the hotel, illumined clearly two figures standing close together.

A slim, girlish silhouette was caught close in the arms of a tall, dark-haired man. Before Gloria's horrified eyes he bent and kissed the girl.

Martin Price—and Paula Worthington!

Gloria stumbled away from the window. Martin—kissing Paula—and on the same night he had professed love for Gloria!

Then the whole thing had been pretense. She hadn't realized that in the back of her mind she had been cherishing the fact that Martin loved her, no matter how unworthy he was. But even that comfort was torn from her now.

Of course, he had known from the first that she came from the detective agency. He had made love to her so that she would abandon her search for the counterfeiters. He and Paula had plotted together.

THIS time Gloria could not cry. Her hurt was too deep for tears.

Slowly she slipped off the pretty blue moiré party frock that she had donned with such high hopes earlier that evening. She kicked off the tiny silver slippers, which had followed Martin's dance steps so joyously. She left her dainty underwear in a heap on the floor.

Nothing seemed to matter, now that love was dead. The night which had begun as the happiest in her life, had turned out the most forlorn! Love had tricked her.

By this time her father probably had received her message. "Am well," meant: "Have discovered man"; and "love," that she was all right. Gloria sighed.

The bed was shrouded in a snowy canopy of sheer mosquito netting. Gloria parted the curtains and got in wearily.

Then she tossed sleeplessly for hours, going over and over in her mind that whole unhappy business. It was only when the sun sent its first reddish rays across the lagoon that Gloria fell into a troubled slumber.

She dreamed of Martin. He seemed to be looking reproachfully at her, and she felt as though she had failed him dreadfully.

Persistent ringing of the telephone summoned Gloria's weary mind back to consciousness. Reluctantly she woke and, still drowsy, lifted the receiver.

"Gloria?" came Martin's voice.

Gloria began to tremble—and was furious at herself for being such a fool.

"Yes," she said slowly.

"Have you any idea that it's past nine, dear?" His voice was so caressing, so dear! Gloria shut her eyes for a second. "I hated to wake you, but I couldn't wait any longer to see you. Please hurry and get dressed and come on down. It—it's positively eons since I've seen you."

Gloria gripped the receiver till her fingers grew white. "I — overslept," she said faintly. "But — but I'll be down in half an hour."

"You couldn't make it fifteen minutes?"

"No." Despite herself, Gloria felt the corners of her mouth curving upward. She had always read that no-goods were charming. Maybe that's why she couldn't hate Martin as she should.

"Half an hour," she repeated sternly—and then replaced the receiver on

the hook, quickly, lest he say something more.

THIS was going to be worse than she had imagined. How could she go on with the pretense of love—when she could not stamp the actuality out of her heart?

For a wild second she thought of cramming her possessions back into suitcases and hurrying down to catch the boat for home. Then she shook her head. She couldn't fail her father. He was trusting her to carry on for him. No matter how her heart ached, she must continue to see Martin.

But there mustn't be any more love-making. She couldn't endure that. Somehow she must arrange that they should never be alone together. That last kiss of parting the night before must be farewell.

Within the half hour she had promised Gloria was dressed. She stood by the door, nerving herself for the ordeal of meeting Martin, when the telephone again shrilled its summons.

She thought of pretending she hadn't heard. Of course it was impatient Martin. No, not impatient—merely pretending he was. Everything had been pretense. Nothing was real.

Slowly she crossed the room. "Hello," she said listlessly.

"Miss Harmon?" The voice wasn't Martin's. It was a totally different sort of tone. Rather high and excited, yet slightly muffled.

"Yes?" Her curiosity was aroused.

"This is Graham. George Graham. Just got in on the San Juan this morning. You know that little matter we were discussing in New York?"

His pause called for an answer, so Gloria said: "Yes," but all the time her mind was busy on the problem of Graham's voice.

She judged people by their voices very largely. Oddly enough, when she had talked to Graham face to face, she hadn't noticed how—well, *furtive* his tone was. But over the telephone she got the impression of fear from Mr. Graham's rapid utterance. Queer. But he was talking on.

"Something new came up, so I hopped the Saturday boat and just got in. Can I see you immediately?"

"I'll come to the mezzanine right away," answered Gloria. "Go into the library and I'll join you there."

"O K." The receiver clicked.

Gloria considered. What had George Graham found out? What was bringing him to Porto Rico? Had he discovered Martin's identity, too? Questions buzzed about like angry bees. She resolved to see Martin first, and then Mr. Graham.

With heart beating very fast, she went all the way down in the elevator to the lobby. Martin. In a moment she would see him again.

BUT Martin wasn't there. Instead, one of the bell boys came up, smiling broadly with the sort of grin which scents romance. "Mees Harmon?" he asked.

"Yes." Gloria hardly looked at him, she was so busy preparing herself to meet Martin.

"Señor Price, he leave this." The boy was thrusting a sheet of hotel stationery into her hand. Quickly she spread the folded paper and read:

DEAREST:

I'm so sorry, but something has come up that takes me to the other end of the island immediately. I am heartbroken at leaving in this unceremonious fashion, but you must trust me until I can explain further. In haste, but none the less in love!

MARTIN PRICE.

Deliberately, Gloria folded the note twice and then tore it into minute pieces. The bell boy looked crestfallen. Thus cavalierly destroying a love note wounded his Latin soul.

Gloria thought she understood. Martin had glimpsed Mr. Graham, and in some way guessed that he was an enemy; so Martin had fled.

Gloria shut her eyes for a second. Martin was a coward, added to all the rest of the miserable things she knew concerning him—and yet, she couldn't get over caring! She knew, in her heart of hearts, that she loved Martin Price, now and forever, no matter what he did.

A moment later she was greeting Mr. Graham. Instantly she had the impression that he was worried.

"I had a message from my foreman, Pedro Gonzales, just after you left," he said. "Pedro informs me that despite our efforts, the Federal authorities seem to have wind of our predicament. There has been considerable questioning of the workers by a stranger who has been hanging about the plantation."

"Well, what of that?" asked Gloria coolly. She was trying to solve her own private problem of why Mr. Graham should be so perturbed.

"But that's exactly what we want to prevent! You don't know how hard it is to get these fellows to work, anyway. They're lazy and shiftless. They don't care what happens to themselves or their families. If they get frightened they'll throw up their jobs, and then where will I be?"

GLORIA'S mind leaped back to a conversation she had held with the friendly bellhop the day before, while waiting for Martin to get tennis rackets. The bellhop had told her that every one on the island was exceedingly anxious to work — only there weren't enough jobs to go around. He had said that for even the most menial employment applicants stormed the doors.

So—some one was lying. Gloria felt it her business to find out which of the two stories was true.

She let nothing of this creep into her conversation, however.

"I see," she said crisply. "Then perhaps it would be better if I took the trip to Ponce to-day, instead of waiting longer."

"Exactly, my dear young lady!" Mr. Graham rubbed his hands together. "That was exactly what I had in mind. So I took the liberty of hiring a car. It 'll be at the hotel in an hour. That will give you time enough to pack, won't it?"

"Thank you, but I've already made arrangements with the driver who takes parties from the hotel."

Mr. Graham pursed his lips. "I hate to say it—but the hotel people sting you dreadfully! And since, after all, I'm paying for all this—"

"As you like!" Gloria shrugged. She found this man more and more distasteful. Every word he uttered added to her dislike.

She got away from him as soon as she could and went to her room. Quickly she packed, tumbling in dresses regardless of possible wrinkles. She didn't care how she looked—now that there was no Martin to give her sweet compliments.

"Darn that man!" she said aloud, as she wadded up the moiré evening frock and flung it into the suitcase with all her might. She recalled how he had told her that she looked like a bit of tropical sky, come to earth, in that dress.

Would she go on remembering, always? Wouldn't she ever forget?

WHEN she went down to the lobby, a short time later, she found the place teeming with unusual activity. Bellhops and elevator boys were running about, and even the pretty girl who presided over the curio corner had left her post.

"What's the matter?" questioned Gloria of this girl.

"The clerk, he find he take in—how you say—wrong money?"

"Counterfeit?" Gloria's eyes widened.

"*Sí, señorita!* That is it. Counterfeit. Some one pay a bill, and give, oh, very much money that is not good! They try to find out who give this money, but I do not think they know."

Martin— The cold weight that was Gloria's heart grew still heavier.

"Who found out that this money was no good?"

"Señor Graham. He asked the clerk to change a fifty-dollar bill for him. Since he is known at this hotel, the clerk do this thing. Señor Graham look at the money and will not take it because it is no good!"

Gloria closed her eyes for a second. Martin had settled for his hotel account with counterfeit bills. How horrible! She swayed.

"Thank you, Mr. Lopez." Graham's voice came to her ears. "It was good of you to adjust this little matter so promptly—and I hope you catch the miscreant who passed off the spurious money."

While Gloria was trying to figure out why his utterance had seemed so strange, Mr. Graham caught sight of her.

"Ah, Miss Harmon, you are more than prompt!"

He strode to the door and signaled a large red car.

"Make this trip to Ponce pretty snappy," he said to the driver.

"*Pronto!*" said the man, not turning about. Most of the chauffeurs in the island were negroes, and this fellow was blacker than some of them.

"I didn't know you were going, too, Mr. Graham," said Gloria. Somehow the idea of making the long drive with this man sent a little shiver of apprehension down Gloria's spine. "Wouldn't it be better for me to make the trip alone?"

Mr. Graham laughed. "Not at all. Every one down here knows me—and they know how fond I am of pretty girls! They will merely think that I am showing you my estates. You aren't the first girl I've taken up to my place for a week-end visit!"

He smiled again, showing all his teeth widely. Gloria's dislike of the man flamed anew in her heart.

"Indeed?" she said coldly.

THE car was darting along at a headlong pace, expertly guided through traffic. They passed other automobiles with only a narrow margin of clearance.

Gloria found herself gasping. Surely they were going to hit that horse-drawn cart. But no, they cleared the wagon by a fraction of an inch and went merrily careening on their way. Gloria forgot her distrust of Mr. Graham in this mad ride.

"Hadn't you better tell him to slow down?" she asked hastily.

Mr. Graham didn't reply. He was fumbling about on the floor of the car.

"I inquired in the dining room and found that you hadn't been in to breakfast, so I had them put up a little lunch."

As he spoke he was unwrapping sandwiches and placing them on a clean paper napkin spread on her lap. Gloria began to say she wasn't at all hungry, but just as the words trembled on her lips she caught the pungent odor of freshly baked bread, combined with newly fried ham. She compromised on eating hungrily!

Besides the sandwiches, there was a short stubby banana, of the "fig" variety, and two rose-apples, as the natives call a small sweet round fruit; and a greenish orange that was really very juicy and nice.

To top the whole, Mr. Graham brought forth a thermos bottle filled with steaming hot coffee. He poured out a generous helping in the metal cover. Gloria didn't care much for coffee, but she felt rather weak and dizzy from lack of sleep and her misery over Martin, so she downed it quickly.

"Ugh!" she said, making a face. "I don't like this Porto Rican coffee! They make it too strong and bitter."

Mr. Graham laughed. "You soon get used to it. Every one dislikes it at first. Come—have another cup."

Because he had already poured it, and she hated to fuss about refusing, Gloria drank that, too.

Almost immediately everything began to seem hazy. The vivid tropical sun grew dim. The bright green of the leaves and the trees began to mingle with the gray of the macadam road. She slumped back against the seat in a little heap.

GLORIA was awakened by a pungent odor that made her head spin. With a weak hand she pushed away the bottle of smelling salts some one was holding under her nose.

"No," she said, and struggled to sit up. Her head ached violently. She felt queerly stiff and miserable.

Twilight had fallen. That was the first thing that came to her consciousness. The car was still traveling along, but they were on a bumpy, little-used dirt road that wound in and around with vast disregard for direction.

Tall coconut palms were etched sharply against the darkening sky. Lush underbrush grew rank and uncontrolled everywhere except across this meandering little road. The heavy, shining leaves of the rubber tree made a dark green background for the lighter green of the breadfruit tree.

All this Gloria's slowly returning consciousness absorbed, and yet she had not yet realized where she was.

"You have been ill. I was worried about you."

Mr. Graham's voice brought everything back to her. *Drugged!* That coffee had been drugged. She knew that by the violent pain which banded her head. But why? She turned and faced him.

"Silly of me to have been such a baby!" she apologized.

Mr. Graham looked relieved. He thought she was accepting his explanation concerning her illness.

"Where are we?" she continued, looking about and wondering how much time had elapsed since she had lost consciousness.

"That's just it!" Mr. Graham's laugh boomed out again. "This driver seems to have lost his way. We've got off the road somehow, and we're in a regular jungle. I can't figure where we are at all. But the fellow says that he knows a place just up ahead where we can seek shelter from the storm."

"Storm?" Gloria looked out at the cloudless deep blue of the sky with incredulous eyes.

"A storm is blowing up—a bad one." Mr. Graham's tone was getting gruff, as though he were tiring of explanations.

Gloria wished for a long, cool drink of water. Her throat felt dry and parched; her head throbbed miserably. Yet her brain had never been more keenly awake. What was Mr. Graham up to? She never had trusted him.

"What time is it?" she asked.

He fumbled in his pocket and drew out his watch. "Five thirty," he said, and then added, as if to himself: "If it hadn't taken so long to change that tire we'd have been here an hour ago!"

Gloria threw herself upon him—just in time!

GLORIA paid no attention to what he was saying. Her attention was riveted on a bill which had fluttered from his pocket when he had taken out the watch. It was an exceedingly new bank note, folded once.

Swiftly Gloria stooped and grasped the bill.

She had just time to see that it was a fifty when the money was twisted from her grasp.

"Not so fast, little lady!"

Gloria looked at Mr. Graham in surprise. "I wasn't trying to steal your money!"

"I mean," he said deliberately, "that it is high time we understood each other, you and I."

Fear gripped Gloria. "I'll have to ask you to explain a little more clearly," she said—and was proud of herself that her voice did not tremble.

"Fine detectives you are—you and your father!" sneered the man. "Your father meddled in something that did not concern him—and I managed to see that he gave his ankle a nasty twist that would put him out of the running for some time. I had hoped that he

would break his leg—but we can't have everything in this life." He paused to sigh piously.

Gloria felt as if some one had taken her roughly by the shoulders and was spinning her about. She made no reply, but she gripped her hands tightly together to stop their trembling. After a moment Mr. Graham went on:

"The whole thing was managed with very little difficulty. You being a detective — so-called" — Gloria writhed—"made it easier for me to get you down here. And now that you are here, the charm of your delightful personality, and the lure of your beauty make me eager to marry you."

"*Marry?*" repeated Gloria stupidly. "You said—*marry?*"

JUST at that moment the driver hit a chuck hole that bounced them all so that Gloria's head touched the top of the car.

"Pay a little attention to your driving there!" Graham growled, adding a Spanish word that Gloria instinctively knew was an insult.

Then Graham turned back to Gloria. "See, here are two interesting documents," he said, holding them that she might glimpse them and yet not touch.

One was a passport for George Graham and wife — with a Venezuelan visa attached. The other was a document in Spanish which Mr. Graham obligingly translated as a marriage license.

"But—I don't understand," faltered Gloria.

Graham laughed. "A wife may not testify against her husband," he said, as if he were explaining something to a very small, stupid child. "So, if we are caught—anything you might find out will be of no avail. That is reason number one for marrying you. The second is also simple. When you cable your father that you have eloped with me, you will add that you wish him to drop his investigations. He will do that, I am sure—since he wouldn't wish his daughter to serve a prison sentence—in the event that his investigations proved anything. And reason number three—"

He leaned so close that Gloria instinctively shrank away. "I never could resist the lure of gold hair with a glint of red in its depths. You are very lovely, Gloria my dear, and I shall enjoy having you as my bride."

"But — suppose I don't — don't agree?" Gloria's tongue was thick with fear, but she forced herself to speak calmly.

"Oh, but you will!" Mr. Graham spoke in a very low tone, but one which menaced more than if he had blustered. "In a few minutes we will come to my place of business. It is in a most inaccessible spot. No one, except the members of my gang, know of this place. I have been minutely directing the driver."

He dropped his voice to so low a whisper that his lips scarcely moved, yet Gloria caught every word as though he had been shouting.

"A new man that they sent me, instead of my regular chauffeur. But—*he will never leave the place alive!*"

Gloria shuddered, despite the warmth of the waning afternoon.

"You don't know where you've been taken, since my sleeping powder did its work so well. Even if there should be some mischance and you should escape, you wouldn't know where you've been. But there won't be any mischance."

He smiled evilly at her, and Gloria shrank back into the far corner of the seat.

"The—the minister?"

"You are worried about the legality of the little ceremony which will shortly take place? You needn't be! A renegade parson who has never been unfrocked is one of my gang. He'll tie the knot secure enough."

GLORIA'S mind was working like lightning now. "But George Graham isn't your real name," she said quickly. "So, of course, the license isn't legal."

"But that is my name!" he countered. "True enough, I did five years under the name of Edward Conway—but that was the State's mistake."

"Edward Conway!" Gloria's mind whirled. Then Martin Price wasn't Edward Conway! In her joy at that discovery, she almost forgot her desperate peril.

"Yes, that was what your dad was working on. As if I didn't know! I got in before he connected up all the threads of the case, though, and engaged his august counsel. Pretty slick work, I'll say. And then stole his daughter right from under his nose." He snorted contemptuously.

Martin wasn't Edward Conway! Gloria's mind could center only on that wonderful fact.

"Did you see that stunt I pulled at the hotel, too?" Graham was becoming loquacious in his desire to appear a hero in her eyes. "I gave the clerk a phony fifty, and then palmed the good tens he handed over—and made him give me another set of tens instead. A hundred dollars cold—with no outlay on my part except that piece of paper with fifty printed across it—and those five tens that belonged to the first batch we made. A child could have detected them, they were so bad. But I kept 'em, thinking they'd come in handy sometime. And they did."

So Martin hadn't passed those counterfeit bills either! "Martin!" she breathed, not conscious that she spoke aloud.

MR. GRAHAM was deep in his further exploits when, curiously enough, the driver turned about. Gloria stifled a scream; her hand flew to her heart in a betraying gesture.

The big collar and the oversize hat, and black stain, couldn't disguise Martin's eyes. She would know them anywhere. Martin Price, disguised as a negro chauffeur, was driving their car!

"Hey, what's the matter?" asked Graham, staring at her.

"I thought I saw a—a bear over there." Gloria waved a hand at random.

Graham chuckled. "Isn't one of them on the island," he said. "Don't get nervous, Gloria darling. I'll treat you right."

"How far we gotta go, boss?" broke in the driver.

It *was* Martin! Although he had adopted a deep guttural tone, with a hint of Spanish accent, Gloria recognized him.

"The cabin's straight ahead. Only about twenty yards or so now."

He turned to Gloria.

"I think I forgot to tell you that we're picking up the new batch of fifties the boys are just finishing, and we'll drop them in South America. As soon as we're married we'll head for Venezuela in my yacht that's anchored just outside of Ponce. Pretty good scheme, don't you think? Your father off my track—permanently; plenty of money to spend, and a long time till the exchange gives the alarm about the bills; plus the company, meantime, of a most charming wife."

Just then a sudden gust of wind swept over the countryside, bending the trees and shrubs and rustling the leaves like a giant New Year's noise-maker. The wind buffeted the car, slowing its pace. Close on the heels of the gale came sheets of rain, drenching everything in no time.

The miniature hurricane did something which caused Gloria's heart almost to stop beating. It swooped off that large hat of Martin's and whirled it away. Martin's straight dark hair wasn't negroid by any stretch of imagination.

Moreover, there was a rim of white where the hat had been wedged, and perspiration had streaked away the black stain. Martin was too busy getting the car back into the road to notice. But Graham did.

BEFORE Gloria could shrill a word of warning, Graham had whipped an automatic from his pocket.

"Martin!" Gloria screamed the word, and it cut through the roar of the wind and rain, so that Martin involuntarily dodged. Graham's bullet splintered the instrument board.

Martin crashed on the brake and the car skidded to a standstill, half turning about as it did so.

Gloria threw herself on Graham like a wild cat, biting and scratching. Afterward she was horrified at the way she had acted; but at the time she had only one thought—to save Martin's life.

And she succeeded.

Graham had to fight her off—and in the meantime Martin had vaulted over the seat and was engaging in a hand-to-hand struggle for the possession of the weapon.

Martin won. But the noise of the shots had summoned help from the cabin down the road.

"I hear people coming!" Gloria cried, her voice sounding above the shriek of the wind and the mad pelting of the rain.

But Martin was saying something that made her heart still its wild beating.

"You fool, Graham!" he said. "I'm Number Nine. Can't you see? It was just a joke planned by some of the boys, to have me drive when José didn't show up. Here. Take your gun. Only be careful it doesn't go off next time."

Graham's unwilling laugh boomed out. "That would have been a good one if I'd shot you, Number Nine. The joke would have been on you then."

A group of men, Spanish and American, had crowded about the car, all wanting to know what had happened. The affair was explained amid shouts of laughter.

Gloria sat in the corner of the car, numbed with horror and disappointment. Somehow she had taken it for granted that Martin had come to save her. She had thought that he was on her side, in some inexplicable manner.

Would she never get over being a fool? Here she was, away off from nowhere, in the power of men who seemed to stop at nothing—and Martin was one of the gang. Number Nine. She shivered.

THE men sounded very gay. The laughter and shouts were more than the occasion seemed to demand. Evidently they had been drinking some of the liquor distilled from sugar cane residue—a most potent drink.

"And where is the bride?" shouted one especially tall chap who was evi-

dently an American. "I'm the minister. Where's the bride?"

Gloria shrank back against the seat, her eyes big with horror.

"Here comes the bride!"

The rest took up the chant. A dozen hands were lifted to help Gloria alight, but somehow Martin was first. He almost lifted her to the ground. As he did so, she felt him grip her arms unnecessarily hard, as if he were trying thereby to convey some message.

The tropical night was descending swiftly. Darkness crept in upon them like the menacing blackness of a nightmare. Gloria felt as if a thousand evil fingers were touching her. The rain beat on her green felt hat, rendering it a sodden mass before they had gone ten yards.

There was no chance to escape. Graham held tightly to one arm, and Martin grasped the other. She went along, docilely enough, wet and miserable and hopeless, but she had determined not to give up without a struggle.

The cabin looked exactly like any one of a hundred others all over the island. Thatched roof; two sides open to the world; dirt floor; naked bronzed babies tumbling about the door.

But once inside it was quite different. The sod, brushed aside in one place, disclosed a trapdoor.

"Right down, if you please," said Graham to her when she hung back. "There's a ladder. It's quite simple." Then, as she still hesitated: "I should hate to use force!"

GLORIA descended the wooden ladder without further parley. She found herself in quite a large room, lighted by kerosene lamps. The air was musty with the smell of earth, and people, and kerosene. For a space she could hardly breathe.

"Clever, isn't it, my pretty detective?" asked Graham as she glanced around. "This hut from the outside is a replica of so many others! But down here—ah, so different! See my—er—printing press?"

He waved his hand toward the mass of machinery in the far corner of the place.

"That's where ten-dollar bills have originated—to bother the Harmon Detective Agency. That's where those fifties came from that will buy us happiness in Caracas and Rio, my dear."

Gloria looked appealingly at Martin, but he would not meet her glance. The shadows of the men were thrown against the wall magnified a hundredfold.

Gloria's hand stole to her throat. This was like some hideous dream come to life. It seemed to her that giants were menacing her on every side. She swayed, and would have fallen, had not Martin supported her.

"Courage!" She could not tell whether she had actually heard the word, or if it were some figment of her overwrought imagination. She glanced quickly at Martin, but he still looked aloof and uncaring.

"Let's get along with this marriage," said Graham, shivering a little. "I feel sort of queer, as if something bad were going to happen. I have hunches that way."

"I'm ready." The minister stepped forward, a trifle unsteadily.

"No, no!" Gloria was hardly aware that she spoke, but the words came from her lips in a little moan.

THINGS happened so fast then that she couldn't realize. One moment Martin was standing indolently beside her. The next he had thrust her roughly behind him. As if

by magic, two revolvers had appeared in his hands.

"Hands up, every one! Drop your automatic, Graham."

Then, as Graham made no move toward obeying, stupefied by surprise, Martin let one of his revolvers speak.

Graham gave a cry of pain and flung his weapon on the floor. An arm hung limp by his side.

"Rush him, fellows!" One of the Americans spoke, but the others hung back.

"Try it!" challenged Martin, his voice exultant. "Try it!"

He appeared to be listening.

"The jig's up," he continued. "In about two seconds a crowd of my men will be here. I hear them now. There's no use trying any tricks. I've got you dead to rights. Be sure all your men are loyal, next time, Mr. George Graham. You had one traitor in your midst, and he traded places with me—on promise of immunity for his own miserable hide. I've been Number Nine for some time — waiting for a chance to get you, Graham. But you were mighty elusive. I couldn't prove that you were the brains of the outfit—until to-night. But now—"

There was a clatter of feet and the room was filled with men.

"Got 'em, chief!" One of the newcomers saluted. "We'll bundle them into our cars outside and take them to the lockup at Ponce — then — back to the States."

Graham was the last one to leave, mumbling threats and curses as he was led away.

MARTIN faced Gloria in the stuffy room. "What do you say we get out in the air?" he murmured.

"Who are you?" Gloria gasped.

Martin had her close in his arms and was kissing her throat, her face, her lips.

"Secret Service," he murmured. "Does it matter?"

Gloria clung to him. "I thought you were a crook," she said wildly. "My father sent me a wire saying you were a crook. I nearly died."

She was crying now, and Martin was kissing away her tears.

"Was the message in code?" asked Martin.

"Yes."

He laughed. "The Spanish wireless men sometimes get mixed up," he said. "I'll bet they got the code twisted. I had a message from your father, telling me to look out for you, and saying that he was wiring you that my sister Paula and I were Secret Service operators, and—"

"Your *sister,* Paula!" gasped Gloria.

"Sure. Paula Worthington is my sister. Didn't she tell you that? But, of course, she wouldn't. Sis is awfully close-mouthed when she's on a job. But let's get out of this."

Picking up Gloria as if she had been a baby, Martin climbed up the ladder and carried her out into the night air.

Every one had gone, save one man left on guard. The rain had stopped with the abruptness common to tropical storms. Only a warm little breeze was left as souvenir of the wildness of the dying day.

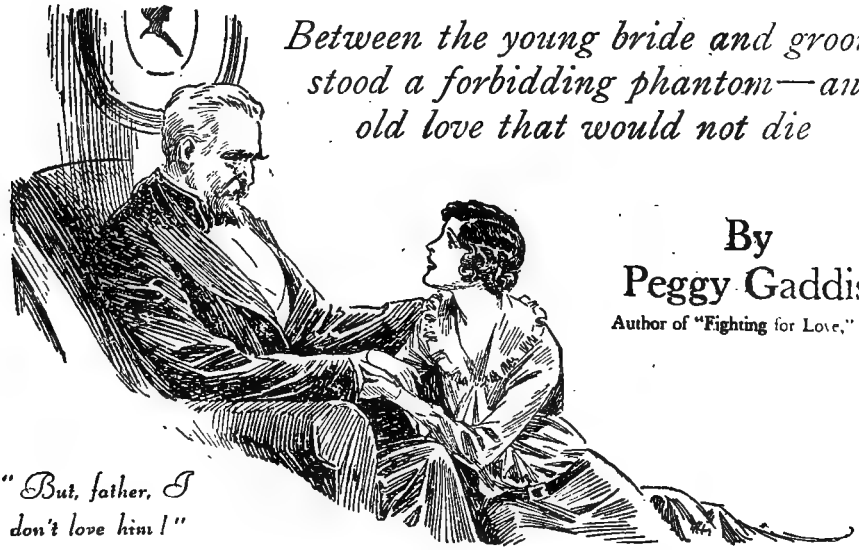
Martin hugged Gloria close.

"I know a man in Ponce who would marry us to-night!" he whispered in her ear. "What do you say?"

What Gloria said must have been entirely satisfactory, for she followed Martin into an automobile which two minutes later was tearing down a moonlit road in the direction of Ponce.

Wedded Strangers

Between the young bride and groom stood a forbidding phantom—an old love that would not die



"But, father, I don't love him!"

By
Peggy Gaddis
Author of "Fighting for Love," etc.

IT was very quiet in the shabby, cozy old living-room. Shaded floor-lamps placed in two corners pushed the shadows back and spilled apricot-colored pools of light on the polished dark floor. Though it was early spring a small fire blazed on the hearth, for old Judge Forrester loved the firelight.

He dropped his paper with a sigh of content, and looked across at his daughter, Norma. She sat in a comfortable old wing chair, her small body half hidden in its depths, a lamp on a table beside her illuminating her filmy frock and her book, but leaving her face in kindly shadow.

"Seems mighty good to have you home again, Norma girl!" the judge remarked, and did not see that she started, almost guiltily.

"It's—good to be home again, father!" said Norma, docilely, though the lie seemed to stick in her throat.

"Have a good time up north, honey?"

He had already asked that a dozen times since her return three days before, but Norma answered once more, patiently.

"A wonderful time, father—but—I was glad to get back."

He drew deeply on his cigar before he spoke again.

"Norma, you're going to have a caller this evening!"

Norma looked up, startled.

"A caller, father?"

"Yes, dear, is it so amazing that the prettiest girl in South Carolina should have a caller?" demanded her father,

adoringly. "Young Warner asked if he might call. He—has something to say to you!"

Norma waited. A band seemed to contract suddenly about her terrified heart.

"You see, Norma, I've always said Louis Warner was not like most young fellows his age. Louis has a proper respect for the older generation and a proper respect toward the girl he wants to marry. Therefore, he asked me for your hand to-day—for permission to ask you to marry him!"

For a moment Norma sat perfectly still, staring at her father with wide, stricken dark eyes. Her mouth was dry—there was a sort of roaring in her ears—she could not find words to answer.

"He's a fine man, Norma," said Judge Forrester. "He will take care of you—make you happy. He can give you all the lovely, fine things that I've never been able to afford! The decision is yours, Norma—I wouldn't for anything in the world try to urge you—but it would make me very happy to see you mistress of the Warner place."

"But father, I don't love him!" the girl stammered, slim soft hands twisted together in her lap, eyes agonized, heart hammering in her young breast.

JUDGE FORRESTER laughed fondly and bent forward to pat her hands.

"Love? You baby! Of course you don't love him—you're too young to know anything about love! Out of boarding school only three months and says she doesn't love Louis!" he teased. "My dear, no properly brought up young girl knows the meaning of love until she is married. It isn't right that she should! It is only proper that she should learn these things from her husband. And Louis will make you a splendid husband."

Norma could have shrieked aloud at that. Too young to know anything about love? That was funny—if it had not been so hideous!

She too young to know the meaning of love? Why, she had cuddled in Ted Loring's arms and thrilled to the mad magic of his kisses.

She had given him the jewel of her first love, all the stored sweetness of it—only to have Ted, with a light laugh, fling it back into her face and tell her laughingly that he had no intention of marrying.

Yes, Ted had actually laughed at Norma when, in pain and bewilderment, she had interpreted his charming love-making as the prelude to a proposal of marriage! Ted had called her "a silly little innocent" and had thought it a huge joke when she had told him that she would never have permitted his caresses had she not thought he wanted to marry her!

And now her blessed old dad was looking at her with tender, adoring eyes and telling her that no well brought up young girl understood about love until a husband had taught her!

Suddenly, to Norma's bitter young eyes, her father seemed very old, very shabby, heart-breakingly pathetic. Her dad, who had given her years of devotion, who had never ceased to mourn the young adored wife who had died when Norma was two. Who had given to the baby daughter the love that had belonged to his wife.

Norma's eyes misted with tears. What had she ever done to repay her father for all those years? He had gone shabby, had worked unceasingly, had deprived himself of tiny luxuries

that she might have pretty clothes and go to a good school.

And she had repaid his self-sacrifice by going on a visit to Richmond, and flinging her untried heart into the keeping of a handsome young rake, who had laughed at the most precious gift a girl can offer.

Suddenly she looked up at her father.

"You—you'd like me to marry Louis?" she stammered.

"Not unless it would make you happy, child!" said her father, promptly. "But Louis is a fine young man—I've known him since he was a baby. I would feel safe in giving you into his keeping—and—yes, it would make me happy if you cared for him enough to marry him. I want to feel that you will be sheltered and protected when I am no longer here to look after you."

Norma got up with a little muffled cry and put her arms about him.

"Don't you *dare* talk like that—you're going to be here to take care of me for years and years and years! But I'll marry Louis, if you want me to. If it would make you happy," she cried, unsteadily.

LATER when Louis stood in the room she studied him, almost impersonally. This was the man she had promised her father she would marry, even though her undisciplined soul cried out to the man who had laughed at her in Richmond.

Louis was tall, loosely built, with the casual strength of the athlete who keeps in training for pure love of it. He was twenty-eight, and from the viewpoint of her own nineteen years Norma thought that close to old age.

Louis had thick, dark hair, a pleasantly homely, "nice" face and steady, blue-gray eyes. He was rich with inherited wealth to which, with native ability and energy, he had added even more. He was spoken of with respect as a promising young business man.

"I love you very much, Norma," he pleaded. "I'm going to be awfully good to you and make you very happy—if you'll let me!"

His voice rang in Norma's ears with an almost terrifying intensity.

"But—but—I don't—*love* you, Louis!" she faltered, with a desperate effort at honesty.

"Darling child, of course you don't! That's because you've been brought up in a strict girls' boarding school. You're a sweet, innocent, old-fashioned little darling—how *could* you know anything about love?" he teased her, tenderly, as her father had done. "But I can teach you to love me, Norma. So, if you've no better objection to offer than that—I'm afraid I'm going to consider that you've said yes!"

For an agonizing moment Norma seemed to see her father's patient, kind, tired eyes. Louis was rich—she could give her father all the luxuries he had never known. Maybe by marrying Louis she could repay her father a little for the years of devotion to herself.

And since she could never have Ted, what difference did it make whom she married?

Louis, reading her hesitation as a shy, maidenly "yes," took her gently into his arms and drew her close, his heart trembling with delight as she colored hotly beneath his kiss and hid her face against his shoulder.

LATER, in her room, she faced the past, Ted, the two months that she had known him. His whirlwind courtship that she had thought the equivalent of a proposal. How he had

held her in his arms—the touch of his ardent, handsome mouth upon her own—

Sara Hart, Norma's hostess, who had been her room-mate at school, had tried to warn Norma, but she wouldn't listen. Adoring Ted, she had refused to hear anything against him.

Then had come the last night of Norma's visit. She was leaving very early the next morning for Fair Oaks, South Carolina. And she had waited confidently for Ted's arrangement—when would he come to Fair Oaks to meet her father? When would they be married? Not for a single instant did it occur to her that these were not Ted's plans.

It had been a warm spring night of exquisite beauty. A silver—no, a platinum moon like a round plate floated lazily in a sky of taut-drawn blue chiffon held in place by stars. She and Ted had been in the garden on a white bench beside an oval lily pool shimmering in the moonlight.

"This time to-morrow night I shall be a long way off—I wonder where you'll be, Ted?" she had said, at last, breaking the little silence that she had been quite sure was a preliminary to Ted's proposal.

He shied a half smoked cigarette into the pool and glanced at her, an almost wary look in his eyes.

"Probably here or hereabouts!" he replied lightly. "I'm going to miss you like the dickens, child. You've been darned good company this summer."

A tiny chill hand seemed suddenly to lay itself against Norma's eager heart. She stared at him, bewildered.

"But—Ted—you'll be coming to Fair Oaks—soon, won't you?"

Ted's expression altered.

"I—hardly think so. Why should I?" he asked briefly, almost brutally.

Norma sat perfectly still for a moment, and in the moonlight her face was pallid, her eyes wide and stricken.

"Ted!" she whispered at last. "You—you—but, aren't we—going to be—married?"

THERE was a tiny, breathless silence. Then—*Ted laughed!* Norma flinched as though he had slapped her full in the face.

"Oh, so that's the little game, eh? Well, it won't work, my child!" he told her, coolly. "Married? What on earth ever put that idea into your head? I'm quite sure I never said anything about marriage, did I?"

Norma was trembling violently. This thing had happened so swiftly that she hadn't had time to adjust herself, to clutch at her pride. All her defenses were down before this terrible thing—the way Ted was behaving after their glorious, glamorous two months of love-making and joy.

"But—Ted—you've made love to me—" she faltered.

"I've kissed you a few times, yes," Ted cut in, icily. "We've been partners on picnics and at dances and so on. People said you were my 'girl-friend' and I was your 'steady'—yes! Beyond that, absolutely nothing!"

He paused to give her an opportunity to contradict, but the girl said never a word.

"The time has passed when those things were considered equal to a proposal of matrimony," he continued. "Good Lord, Norma, what's come over you? You've been a level-headed, sensible little kid. I've liked you a lot. You're a grand little play-fellow—but why spoil it all now by getting sticky and sentimental? I didn't ask you to marry me. I'm not marrying *anybody!*

Heck, I can't even make a living for myself, let alone support a wife!"

Norma felt as if every irritable, brutally chosen word were a separate blow upon her defenseless body. She cowered before him, her face hidden in her hands, facing the wreck and ruin of all her youthful dreams of life and love.

She had heard voices—Sara and another girl, with two boys, members of the house party, coming along the garden walk. Unable to face them, she had sprung up, had run blindly away to her own room. Behind her she had heard somebody ask a question—heard Ted's irritable voice answering it—a little burst of laughter.

Even now, she writhed at the thought that they were laughing at her. That her innocence and her faith in Ted and her belief in the beauty of love had provided these sophisticated young people with material for laughter—

She hadn't seen Ted again. She had taken an early train the following morning, and now she was at home—and engaged to be married to Louis Warner.

Her lip curled with a bitter thought—she would send Ted one of the beautifully engraved announcements of her betrothal. That ought to furnish him with food for thought. Engaged within two weeks of the evening beside the lily pool!

ON a day in late spring, when the sky was blue and dotted with soft little fleecy clouds when the fine old trees in the park were lifting branches adorned with new leaves, and the gardens of Fair Oaks were filled with the yellow laughter of daffodils, Norma Forrester dressed for her marriage to Louis Warner.

She had a simple white chiffon frock and her mother's wedding veil as her bridal outfit and the trunkful of new clothes bought for her début season as her trousseau.

The happiness in her father's eyes strengthened her for this day. He had been almost boyishly happy. He seemed not so tired, or so old, or quite so feeble, she told herself, as he had been before her engagement. Oh, she could face anything—anything—if it helped her father to be happy, if in some slight measure it could repay him for those years of self-sacrifice.

The small church was fragrant with spring blossoms and filled with people in new Easter clothing. People who were life-long friends of Judge Forrester, of Louis Warner, of Norma. Men and women who had known and loved her mother; boys and girls with whom she had gone to school.

Many eyes misted with affection as Norma, small and slender and lovely in her white frock and filmy white veil, paced slowly down the aisle on the old judge's arm to meet Louis, who stood very tall and proud, his eyes adoring her as he waited at the altar.

There was a roaring in Norma's ears when the minister began to pronounce the beautiful, slightly awesome words of the marriage ceremony.

She heard her father's voice, resonant, strong, in answer to the query, "Who giveth this woman?—" She heard Louis's voice, vibrant with happiness, making his responses.

And then a faint, frightened voice—could it be her own?—promising to love, honor and obey Louis.

How funny! She could almost have shrieked aloud in hysterical mirth.

Honor Louis? Well, yes, she would always do that.

Obey? Perhaps that, too.

But love him? Her sick heart told

her that never as long as Ted Loring lived could she love any one else.

THE ceremony was over at last. The bride was leaving the church on Louis's arm. She was in the limousine, driving toward the shabby, beloved old house where she had been born and reared.

There was the reception to be gone through—shaking hands with people until her wrists throbbed, smiling until her face ached with the effort. Remembering to thank people for their good wishes—listening to Louis's happy laugh.

Oh, would it never be over? Would she never be free to slip away, to face in solitude the thing she had done?

She began to be terribly afraid. She had married one man, adoring another. She had stood in front of the altar, and in the face of God's minister, she had repeated the vows of God's church—had sworn to love, honor and obey this man who, suddenly, seemed like a stranger. This man who looked down at her with tender, exultant eyes, adoring her—

At last it was time to leave. To change her wedding gown for the beige ensemble that was to be her "going away" gown. In her own room, with only a mulatto maid to help her, she stepped out of the little chiffon frock, saw the filmy precious veil folded carefully away and donned the beige ensemble.

She was like one moving in a dream. Surely it could not be Norma Forrester to whom all this was happening—surely she would awaken soon and find it all some ghastly nightmare.

Dressed at last in the beige crape frock and the coat with its soft fur collar, the little hat dragged smartly down over her frightened eyes, the wedding bouquet in her hand ready to be tossed from the stairs and clutched by the next bride, the little maid spoke to her.

"De judge am waitin' fo' yo', Miss No'ma, in de liberry!"

Norma's heart quivered. Her father waiting alone to say good-by to her! She had repaid his sacrifices with one tremendous forgetting of self. She had married Louis because her father had said that it would make him very happy. That was the one lovely thing in all this maze of cross-purposes.

She slipped down the back stairway and made her way, unseen by the chattering wedding guests, to the library. Her father sat in a deep old leather chair beside an open window. A soft breath of fragrance crept in from the garden—the fragrance of spring flowers, daffodils, tulips, valley-lilies—

"FATHER!" said Norma, softly. He was asleep, his head dropped back against the leather cushions. She stood looking down at him, her eyes misted with tears.

How tired, how old—how pathetic he looked. He, too, had known a wonderful love—and had lost it!

From the depths of her own sorrow she caught a faint glimpse of the sorrow he had known. Down on her knees she sank beside his chair, resting her cheek against his hand.

She recoiled a little at the chill of that hand and flung up her head, staring at his still face. Horror clutched suddenly at her heart— Oh, it couldn't be, it *couldn't* be!

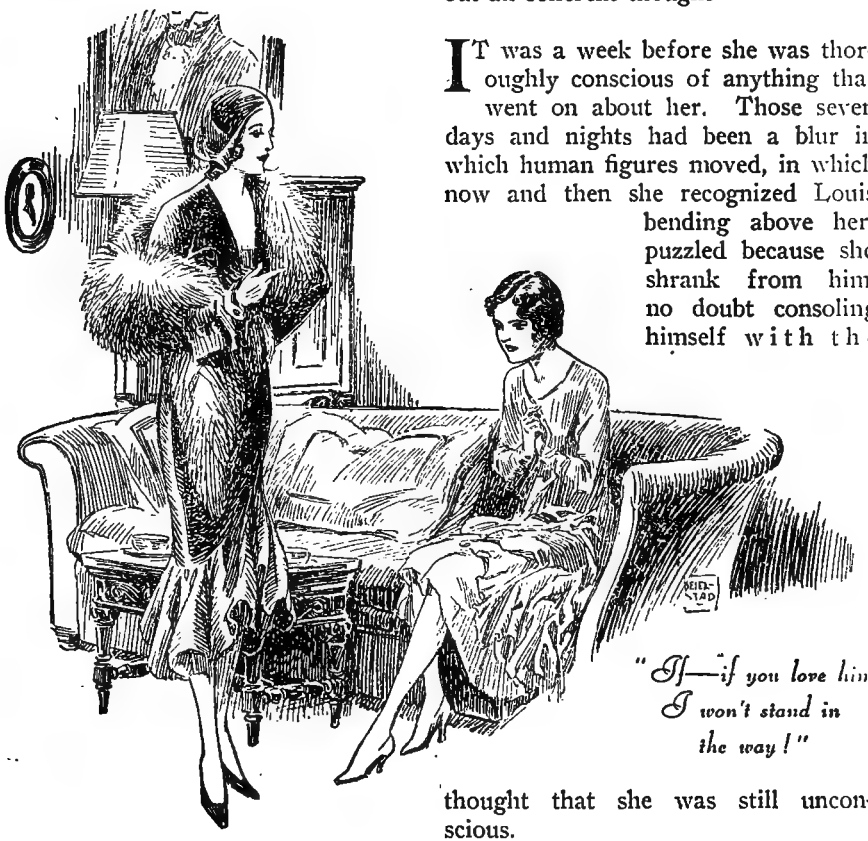
She laid her hand swiftly against his cheek. At the touch of his flesh, cold and lifeless, she flung up her head and shrieked aloud. Shriek after shriek that brought Louis and the wedding guests rushing to her.

Her father still sat, quite still and calm, an expression of great happiness, a smile on his face as though he were greeting his dearly beloved.

"Your father, Miss Norma, had been under sentence of death for the past six months or so," the doctor told her, a long time afterwards. "His heart. I had warned him that he hadn't long. He was getting his affairs in order."

And in the light of that Norma could understand perfectly her father's anxiety to have her married. But now, in the horror of that moment when she knew beyond all doubt that her father was dead, it all seemed so horrible, so unfair, so sudden.

She had married only because he wished it, and now he was gone—Louis picked her up as merciful unconsciousness swirled over her, wiping out all coherent thought—



"If—if you love him I won't stand in the way!"

IT was a week before she was thoroughly conscious of anything that went on about her. Those seven days and nights had been a blur in which human figures moved, in which now and then she recognized Louis bending above her, puzzled because she shrank from him, no doubt consoling himself with the thought that she was still unconscious.

But at last she faced Louis, alone with him in the cozy old drawing room where, eight weeks ago, her father had said it would make him happy if she would marry Louis. It seemed thoroughly in keeping with Norma's feeling that it should be raining outside—a sharp, sudden thunderstorm, accompanied by slashing lightning and a veritable downpour.

Louis had just come in, and Norma

stood up to face him, looking pallid, years older, in her somber garments.

"My poor little darling!" he said gently, and started to take her into his arms. But she shrank from him, moving suddenly, so that the tall chair in which she had been sitting became a barrier between them.

"I—I—have something to tell you, Louis—a confession to make!" she told him, starkly.

Louis paused. His face shadowed, though his eyes were still gentle and adoring.

"Yes, darling?" he prompted. This endearment snapped the slender thread of her control.

She flung out slim, protesting hands.

"Don't call me that! You'll hate me when I tell you the truth about everything!" she cried wildly, and rushed on before he could protest. "I—can't go through with it, Louis—I can't be—your wife—because—I don't—love you!"

Louis smiled a little, as he would have smiled at a child.

"But, my dearest, you *are* my wife, and I shan't give you up. Though I shan't—hurry you! You've had a terrible shock, and a great grief. I want you to come home with me—but not until you are ready."

NORMA collapsed into the big chair, covering her face with her hands.

"Oh, you *won't* understand, Louis! I can't be *really* your wife—ever! I don't love you. There is—somebody else!"

There was silence in the space of a dozen heart-beats. Louis's pleasantly homely young face went sickly white, his eyes dark and hurt.

"Some one you cared for?" he asked gently.

"Some one I love with all my heart! And shall *always* love!" said Norma, harshly.

There was another silence, as Louis struggled for some word to use, something that would not flay her too mercilessly for the cruel thing she had done to him, in marrying him while she loved another.

"Then why did you marry me?"

"Because my father said it would make him happy," she told him with thoughtless cruelty. "I could marry you to make him happy—if he had lived, I would have done everything in my power to convince him that I loved you, was happy with you. His death was a punishment for the lies I told in marrying you! My heart was Ted Loring's, even while I swore to love *you!*"

"And if you love this Loring why didn't you marry him?" asked Louis, sharply.

Norma's smile was pathetic.

"Because he didn't want me! He just wanted to play around—flirt with me—and I lost my heart!" said Norma. "Oh, I know what you are thinking—that I had no pride, no self-respect or I'd tear him out of my heart! I've tried! Do you suppose I *want* to love a man who laughs at me? But I can't do it! And I can't be your wife while I love—*him!*"

When she had finished the heart-broken plea, Louis had himself pretty well in hand. He confronted her, his face white and set, his eyes tragic with slain dreams.

"Try to get some sleep to-night, Norma. We'll talk things over in the morning and decide what is to be done," he said.

Then, turning on his heel, he walked quickly out of the room and closed the door behind him, leaving her alone in the lamplit room, with the fury of the

summer thunderstorm increasing outside.

SHE did not see Louis again until the following afternoon. His manner was kind and brotherly.

"I've thought it all over, Norma, and I think I have come to a decision that is best for all concerned," he told her, quietly, though there was a hurt in his eyes that her confession had dealt him. "You are, after all, my wife, and we will just have to make the best of things as they are—for a little while. We could have the marriage annulled, but that would cause gossip and scandal. We can't have that, you know. So I thought if you would just come to my house, pretend to the world that we are married and that everything is all right—you would be an honored guest in my house—just my beloved little sister. I would ask nothing of you that you were not willing to give. Outwardly we would be the usual bride and groom. In reality, we would be just brother and sister. Do you understand, Norma?"

She lifted her pale face at last and there were great tears in her eyes. Her soft red mouth was tremulous.

"You — you aren't — angry with me?"

Angry? His mouth twisted bitterly at the inappropriateness of the word. He loved her, adored her.

When they had stood side by side in the flower-filled church and he had held her cold little hand and repeated the vows that made her his wife, he had felt that he held all the world—his world—within his grasp.

The thought that even while she had been docilely repeating, "I, Norma, take thee, Louis," her heart had been crying out for another man, had in it the anguish of death.

"No, Norma, I'm not angry. I'm just trying to understand why you did this cruel thing," he replied, gently. "Will you come with me?"

She turned a slim back on him and hid her face in her hands. Her slender shoulders were shaking with the storm of sobs that overwhelmed her.

She made a gesture that indicated assent to his plan, Louis stood and watched her, making no effort to touch her, unable to trust himself, for he loved her so.

His dreams of their wedding had been so different from this dreadful reality. He had visioned the delight of awakening her, shy and sweet and adorable, to the realities of love—whereupon she had told him, with stark brutality, that her heart belonged to another man.

THE following day Louis took his bride to the beautiful old home that had sheltered three generations of Warners. A big, three-storied white house set in the midst of spacious grounds. In the garden were old-fashioned flowers that had been planted and cared for by three generations of Warner women.

Inside, the house was a treasure-chest of fine old furniture, fine old silver, rare china and glass. The drawing room that ran the width of the house opposite the street, facing on the garden, had French windows opening on a terrace.

In this room, with its yellow brocade walls, its ivory woodwork, its beautifully polished mahogany and darkly shining floors, Norma established her Thursday afternoon "at homes."

She entertained the young married women who had been her own friends, the older married women who had been her mother's and Louis's mother's

friends, and a few still older ladies who had known her own and Louis's grandmothers.

She acquitted herself well in her duties as hostess and managed the household efficiently.

Louis behaved toward her quite as he had before their engagement. He was the affectionate, devoted older brother—no more. Perhaps a little more finely drawn; perhaps a little less youthful and light-hearted; perhaps a little more settled and dignified than seemed proper in a man of his age.

Norma found nothing in his manner that could make her at all uncomfortable. He seemed to have accepted the situation between them as a permanent one. Theirs was a peaceful, if slightly stodgy, uneventful sort of life.

Until a day in early autumn when Mary Hastings came back on a visit to her family.

A few days later Norma learned about Mary, who had loved Louis for years, and whom everybody had thought Louis would marry.

Mary had been abroad for two years; when Norma met her at a dinner given in her honor, the bride's heart sank a little. For Mary was so exactly the sort of woman Louis *should* have married.

Mary was twenty-six; rather tall, with smooth dark hair parted in the middle, brushed sleekly back into a low knot at the nape of her snowy neck, held in place with jeweled combs. She was a sophisticated woman of the world, charming and beautiful.

Norma's heart sickened as she watched Mary and Louis together. Louis hadn't looked so young or happy in months or so intensely interested.

Isolated by the shadows for a moment, Norma observed them. Louis with Mary. The woman who would have adored him, who would have given him a happy home instead of the shell of a house in which he now lived with a girl who was merely his "little sister!"

Alone that night in the charming room that Louis had had decorated for his bride, Norma lay wide awake, thinking of Mary. Seeing again Louis's pleasantly homely, sun-tanned face bent above Mary's lovely, laughing countenance—caught again the glint in Mary's eyes as she looked up at Louis.

And Norma's heart sank heavily. Depressed, unhappy, she wept a little in the darkness, not yet fully awake to the reason for her unhappiness.

TWO or three weeks later Louis telephoned one afternoon from the office that he was bringing home a guest for dinner. Norma planned the dinner, told the cook what was to be served, saw that the flowers were very nice, and thought no more about it.

That evening Louis came in, bringing his guest.

And there, standing beside her husband, Norma looked again with wide, incredulous eyes into the startled face of Ted Loring!

Her world seemed to crash to bits. Her throat grew dry. Her heart hammered until she thought it must ring in the ears of the two men.

She was conscious of Louis's eyes upon her face—dark eyes, inscrutable. Neither she nor Ted had managed a greeting, though she had seen Ted start and his eyes widen, his color change a little as he had recognized her. Louis spoke smoothly, as though he was unaware of anything unusual in the scene.

"Norma, will you entertain Mr. Loring a moment? I'll be right back!" he said, and took himself off, leaving

these two to stand staring at each other dumbly.

Ted spoke first. "Good lord, Norma, it's you! What a situation!"

And Norma burst out wildly: "Why did you come here—how *dared* you?"

Nettled both by her tone and her manner, Ted's eyes darkened. He scowled.

"Oh, for Pete's sake, what's the matter with you, Norma? You're behaving like the heroine of some ten, twent', thirt' melodrama. I had no idea you were here. Warner offered me a real job with real prospects and I took it! I didn't remember the name of Fair Oaks. Frankly, I had forgotten you, Norma. After all, we merely had a summer flirtation—where's the harm in that? Why can't we be friends, anyway?" he snapped.

"My husband knows I married him to please my father, but I don't love him. He knows I love—another man!" Norma added, too bewildered to guard her words more carefully.

Ted was startled. "Good Lord—what did you tell him?"

"That I loved a man who had made love to me but did not want to marry me!" she returned, looking at him oddly. *Had* he changed? Or had *she* changed? He no longer seemed the handsome, reckless boy she had adored.

"Did you tell him my name?" demanded Ted.

"No, I don't think so."

"That's good. Afraid he wouldn't want to give a job to a chap his wife had once been in love with. And I'm telling you frankly, Norma, I want to keep this job!" said Ted. His tone dropped to a coaxing murmur. "Be a good kid, Norma. After all, we were just playing at love. I kissed you a dozen times, maybe—that was all. There's no reason why your husband should know anything about that. Why can't we be friends?"

Louis's footsteps in the hall; Louis's voice speaking to one of the servants. When Louis came into the room he found his wife and his newest employee chatting together formally as two chance acquaintances.

IN the following weeks the evenings that Louis and Norma had formerly spent alone in the big drawing room become foursomes—with Ted Loring and Mary Hastings completing the number.

Mary looked on at the little scene about her with narrow-lidded, very wise eyes, smoked her cigarettes and was the perfect guest.

Ted devoted himself to Mary, until she made it rather plain that he bored her and she much preferred Louis, who seemed willing to entertain her. That automatically left Ted nothing to do but devote himself to Norma.

It was a trying period. Norma grew thinner, a little pale, frightened. Louis was the same—grave, punctilious, entirely courteous—as he would have been toward a sister who bored him slightly.

Ted was restive under the situation but could not afford to say anything. Mary was merely looking on—amused, clever, alert.

So matters stood one morning when Mary called on Norma.

Puzzled to account for so early a call, the bride faced her visitor in the small sitting room at the back—a room more cozy than the larger drawing room, now that the chill gray days of autumn were merging into the moderate winter of that Southern climate.

Mary looked arrestingly lovely in an ensemble of tawny brown velvet, a gorgeous red fox fur slung carelessly

across her shoulders, a bronze-and-gold hat drawn down over her dark, cynical eyes.

"Unearthly hour for a call, of course, but I wanted to see you alone and I thought it might be best for me to see you in the morning," she explained, selecting a cigarette from the case in her lap, lighting it, and blowing a series of exquisitely perfect smoke rings.

"I can't be your wife while I love him!" she said steadily

She leaned forward, suddenly.

"See here, Norma, I'm no good at beating about the bush. Why not lay our cards on the table, have a complete understanding?" When Norma stared at her, a little puzzled, she went on, swiftly: "You and Louis are not in love with each other. Louis isn't happy and neither are you! Why don't you give him his freedom? I could make Louis happy!"

Norma caught her breath. Every drop of color seeped from her lovely face.

"You—you mean—" she whispered.

"I mean that Louis and I love each other!" Mary announced. "He would never have married you if I had been at home. But now—well, we are all modern enough to be able to face divorce with our eyes open! It would mean greater happiness all around. You and Ted Loring, Louis and I!"

NORMA gave a little cry. "Ted Loring and I? Then—that is why Louis brought him here?" she cried suspiciously.

Mary was surprised. Had she stumbled upon something that would bolster up her case—give her a better

chance of getting rid of this girl who blocked her way to Louis—and the Warner fortune?

She dropped her eyes, pretending to be distressed.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! I shouldn't have said that! Louis didn't want me to tell you!" She felt her way carefully, anxious not to say too much.

"You mean Louis brought Ted here so that I would love Ted again—and—and—go away with him?" Norma faltered.

Mary's fingers clenched in triumph. "Again," eh? Then there *had* been something between Norma and Ted! They had once been in love with each other. Then her chance of catching Louis on the rebound was excellent.

"Louis didn't want to tell you why he brought Ted here. But I know that Louis no longer loves you. That can't hurt, because I don't believe you ever loved Louis. Anyway, it would be nice for us all to have a new deal, don't you think? You and Ted—Louis and me!"

Mary spoke briskly. Then, to clinch the argument, she added adroitly: "Why else do you suppose Louis has brought Ted here so much? He hasn't invited any of his other salesmen home to dinner two or three evenings a week, has he?"

Norma quivered as though Mary had struck her. There was conviction in what her visitor was saying. She could no longer doubt. Yet, through the maze of thoughts that were bewildering her, she managed to say:

"If I leave Louis—divorce him—you and he will be married?"

"Of course! And I will make Louis happy. I can, because I love him." Mary added magnificently.

Norma beat her hands together with a little helpless gesture of futility.

"Oh, how can I tell whether or not you're telling me the truth? I don't want to stand in the way of his happiness—but I *must* know that it *is* his happiness before I act!" she cried desperately.

"Then ask him why he brought Ted Loring here!" Mary insinuated. "Of course, if you ask him whether he loves me—his loyalty to you will probably make him say no! But if you will let him think that you love Loring—well, then, you'll get the truth."

Studying her hostess shrewdly, Mary realized she had said enough. She stood up, drawing her fur scarf about her, anxious to be off. She had shot her bolt; she believed that Norma would release Louis.

And Mary intended to see to it that she did not again lose the chance to dip her slender, beautifully kept fingers into the Warner bank account. She was fond of Louis—she had always meant to marry him—but this slip of a girl had captured him while her back was turned.

Well—with a look at Norma's white, stricken face, she told herself that she would have an excellent chance, for it was almost inevitable that Louis would again be free!

NORMA sat on alone in the small sitting room, while a cold November rain lashed against the window panes. She was facing the wreck of all her hopes. She was not yet twenty, but she felt that life for her was finished.

Now, when it was too late, the girl knew she adored Louis. She had never really loved Ted; what she had felt for him was merely a girlish infatuation—it had been spring and she had been in love with love.

There was the ghost of hope. Had

Mary been mistaken? Had she been too sure of Louis's interest in herself? Norma went to the telephone and called Louis.

"I just called to say that we're having quail on toast for dinner to-night. I thought perhaps Mr. Loring might like to dine with us!" she suggested, holding her voice steady with a great effort.

It was the first time she had voluntarily invited Ted Loring to dinner, and there was a moment's hesitation before Louis assured her that he would bring him along.

Norma dressed for dinner that night more carefully than ever before. Her newest frock, a lemon-moiré taffeta with a very full skirt, a tight, round-necked, sleeveless bodice.

Louis's eyes lighted a little at sight of her—and then he glanced swiftly at Ted Loring — and his own eyes dropped.

AFTER dinner, in the drawing-room, Norma faced them both. Her face was pale, her voice choked and queer.

"Louis, I have to ask you a very personal question—it concerns you, too, Ted!—and you must give me your word of honor that you'll answer me frankly. Promise?"

Louis was staring uneasily, but he answered quietly: "Of course I promise—what is it?"

"Did you bring Ted Loring down here for any purpose—aside from business?" Norma asked.

"Yes!" The answer came without a second's hesitation.

"What was that purpose?"

"The hope of making you happy!"

"You thought it would take Ted Loring's presence to make me happy?"

"You told me, a week after our wedding," Louis pointed out, grimly, "that he was the only man you ever loved, or ever could love. I asked your friend, Sara, to help me locate him. I wanted you to be happy—you could not be happy with me, whom you did not love, so I brought Loring to you. That is all."

Norma drew a little uneven breath. The last vestige of hope died in her breast. Then, what Mary had said was true! There could be only one meaning—one reason for his bringing this man down here—that reason to free himself so that he and Mary could be happy together.

Norma turned her head to Ted, with a tiny laugh that was a tattered cloak in which to wrap the remnants of her pride.

"It's your turn now, Ted!" she said, her voice shaken. "Louis and I have had our show down—now it's your turn. Will you take me away with you?"

In the pause, before Ted answered, Louis's face was inscrutable. But something he glimpsed in Ted's expression aroused a storm of rage and before Ted could answer Louis snapped, sharply:

"Norma is asking you, Loring, if you are willing to marry her, once she is free of me! And, of course, you are!"

There was the crack of a whiplash in Louis's voice. Ted cringed somewhat, reacting to it swiftly.

"Of course! Yes, of course—I'd be only too happy—" he stammered, with a forced eagerness that chilled Norma's heart.

She turned gamely to Louis.

"And now, Louis—do you mind leaving us alone for just a few moments? We've lots of things to discuss!"

Without a word, Louis walked out of the room.

THE moment the door closed behind him, Ted turned furiously on Norma.

"Say, what the blazes is the big idea?" he demanded furiously. "Of all the dumb Doras! I never asked you to marry me in my life—and you've certainly gummed things up! If every fellow that made summer time love to a girl got tangled up as I have—"

Norma straightened and drew a hard breath.

"I take it that you don't really care about marrying me, even now!" she drawled, though her heart was quivering with disgust and contempt.

"Darn it, I never said I did! My engagement to Marie Therese Abbott was going to be announced Sunday! Her old man was pleased to death. I'd be set for life," whined Ted.

Norma smiled, very gently.

"Never mind, Ted, I shan't hold you to your promise. You may go ahead with plans to marry your Marie Therese!"

Ted laughed mirthlessly.

"A fat lot you know about it! Warner would blow my brains out if I even looked as though I didn't want to go through with this crazy idea. You've certainly fixed things pretty for me!"

"Don't worry; if I've fixed things pretty for you, I ought to be able to fix them for myself, don't you think?" Norma inquired almost gently. "Run along, Ted, and don't tell any one what has happened to-night! Everything will be all right."

He took himself off grumpily, unable to accept her assurance that his ambitious fortune-hunting plans would not be spoiled on the verge of fruition. After he had gone, Norma went swiftly up the stairs as one who has reached a momentous decision.

IN her own room she caught up a long dark wrap, went swiftly downstairs and let herself out of the house.

The smart new coupé that had been a birthday gift from Louis was in the garage, near the door, a little in front of the bigger, heavier car that Louis himself drove. She backed the car out of the garage and into the street.

Chill November rain had fallen intermittently all day and an icy wind was blowing. But in the little coupé she was quite warm and dry.

She was not in the least excited or hysterical. Her thoughts had never been so clear. Louis loved Mary, and she, Norma, stood between him and his happiness. Therefore, she must remove herself.

She had turned from the main street into the road that led to the beach, several miles away. The little car was spinning along smartly. On either side of the dark paved road there were woods and fields, lit by an occasional flash of lightning.

When Norma reached the beach she parked the car well up on the sand. It must be found there to-morrow morning, so that there would be no possible doubt about what had happened.

Before her there was the pale shimmer of the beach, the black waters, with their tremulous lines of "whitecaps" made by the breakers as they dashed up on the sand and fell back, defeated.

All about her was the small dark huddle of deserted summer cottages. The dance-pavilion was wind-swept, rain-lashed and desolate.

Norma snapped open her compact,

touched a powder puff to her nose, a lip stick to her mouth, slim fingers to her slightly dishevelled hair. There was something gallant about the girl. She would go to a rendezvous with Death looking her best.

She had made a mess of life—she hoped that she would do better at the end. She slipped out of her wrap, flung open the car door, stepped out into the rain and lashing wind.

For a moment she gasped and shivered with the chill. The freshening wind from the ocean, the cold rain on her bare white shoulders almost drove her back to the warmth and dryness of the car.

Then she straightened, flung up her head and walked toward that white line of breakers.

The first shock of the cold water as it curled about her feet in their frivolous little golden slippers, the ankles smartly sun-tanned and stockingless, brought a little gasp, a high, hysterical laugh. She walked forward, steadily—

THE powerful headlights of a car poured a flood of light over her. She heard a man's shout of incredulous horror. Heard the roar of the car as it stopped suddenly.

She tried to run forward to meet the death that beckoned from the waves, but the incoming tide seemed in league against her, hampering her feet, thrusting her back. The water had reached above the knees, when a man's strong arms closed about her.

She was lifted from the water, held hard against a man's rough coat, and carried toward the beach.

For a moment she fought desperately against that rescue, but she was no match for the arms that held her. After a moment, she realized this and relaxed, weeping hysterically, her teeth chattering.

In the sedan, with the overhead light on, the little heater beside the motor spreading grateful warmth over her chilled body, Louis looked down at her, his white face filled with horror, his eyes blazing.

"In the name of God, Norma—*what were you trying to do?*" he asked at last.

"Clear the way so you could be happy with Mary Hastings!" sobbed Norma, hysterically. "And now I'll probably never have the courage to try it again!"

Louis covered his face with his hands, trying to shut out a picture that he knew was etched upon his brain for all time—a wind-swept, rain-lashed beach, gleaming palely in the darkness, great waves breaking in white ripples—and a pitifully small, pitifully gallant slim figure going steadily forward, the water swirling about her—

THE realization of her words crashed through his consciousness after a moment, and he stared at her, bewildered.

"Clear the way so that I could be happy with Mary Hastings? What infernal nonsense are you talking?" he demanded sharply. "What has Mary Hastings to do with you and me?"

"She came to see me to-day—told me that she loved you—that you loved her—and that if it were not for me, you two would get married and live happily ever afterward!"

Norma's teeth chattered as she tried to talk. She had to say it again, had to give him details of what Mary had said, had to explain the scene in the drawing-room after dinner, before Louis understood what it was all about.

And when, at last, the whole thing

had been made clear to him, he stared hard at her, a queer new light in his eyes.

"Norma, a gentleman should never call a lady a liar!" he told her, firmly. "But I'm not a gentleman, and let's pretend that Mary is not a lady—and let me tell you that she is a most unmitigated liar! I had a boy-and-girl crush on Mary a great many years ago—when she wore pigtails, and while you, Norma, were a mere infant. But when you grew up I forgot everybody else. I seem to have been waiting all my life for you to grow up and love me! When you promised to marry me, I was in the seventh heaven! Then, after we were married, you told me about Loring—I wanted to kill him! Finally, as you went about like a little scared mouse, I decided it would make you happy to have him about. I love you enough to want your happiness a thousand times above my own. So I brought him here! I'd have brought the devil himself if I had thought it would make you happy!"

Norma was weeping now, quite frankly. A new warmth crept through her veins, vanquishing the chill.

"Oh, Louis, I've been seventeen different kinds of *idiot*—but—is there any chance that you could still—like me just—a little bit?" she wept, clinging to him.

"No—not a little bit. I *adore* you—always have, always will!" Louis said firmly.

Norma lifted a tear-drenched face and pressed her mouth, tremulous and faintly salt with her tears, against her husband's.

All the lightness, the pretense of gayety went out of Louis and he trembled beneath the magic of that kiss on his lips.

"Oh, my darling!" he murmured, tightening his arms about her—

Outside were the lash of rain, the biting chill of an autumn night, the roar of the ocean, beating ceaselessly, remorselessly, against the pale shimmer of the beach.

But inside the closed car there were warmth and coziness—and the mad magic of love-dreams come true at last.

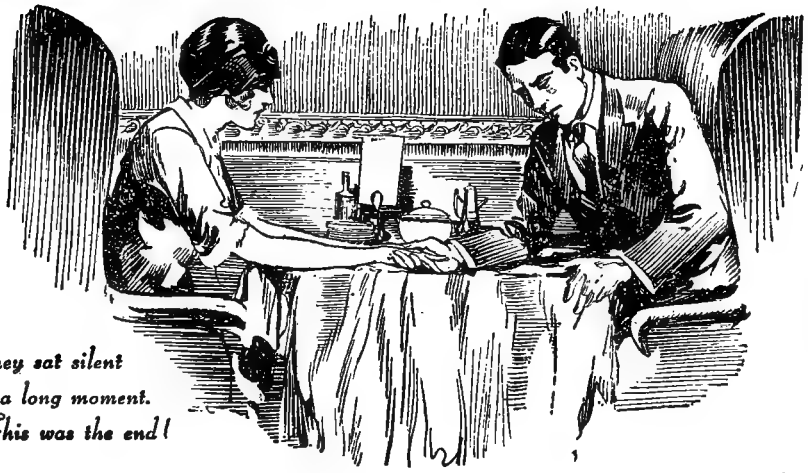
Two young people were blind and deaf to anything except the song in their two hearts.

Love in Doubt

THE torn petal or the strewn rose
Never again to beauty grows;
Nor can the prayers of men remake
The sorrow in an old heartache.

So if love wait, her gift withhold,
Eyes hunger though the lips be cold,
Remember—ah, how well she knows
The torn petal and the strewn rose!

—Arthur Wallace Peach.



They sat silent for a long moment. This was the end!

Belief

Only her unshakable faith in true love brought beautiful Lyla safe through her life's greatest temptation

By Bertha Snow Adams

IT had been a hard week at Bloomfeld's. The after-holiday clearance sale was on, and Lyla Vaughn's nerves were worn to a frazzle trying to please bargain hunters. Then, too, the January Saturday was particularly bleak. Gray skies. A cold drizzle.

Toward quitting time Tom Denham called up and asked her to go to dinner with him. There was something special he wanted to talk to her about, he told her.

Despite utter weariness Lyla's heart began to sing. She felt sure she knew what Tom had on his mind. His firm had given him the promised raise, and now he was going to ask her to marry him! In a thousand ways he'd shown her that he loved her, but his salary wasn't big, and he had his mother to support.

While she dressed for the street Lyla mused happily. Maybe the sales manager of the electrical supply house where Tom worked had quit. Tom had said he was considering another job. If so, Tom would get his place and two hundred a month—not much

Go gle

for three people to live on, but they'd manage somehow. They would have to live very simply, of course. Just a small apartment in some unpretentious neighborhood.

But that didn't matter. Any place would be heaven with dear, warm-hearted Tom coming home to her each night after the day's grind was over. His mother wouldn't always be with them, either. Sometimes she'd go to stay a while with her married daughter, and then— Lyla's pulses quickened. How wonderful it would be! She and Tom — alone together in a cozy little home of their own!

TOM stood leaning against a show window in the brightly lighted entrance to Bloomfeld's. The moment Lyla caught sight of him an icy hand seemed to grip her heart.

His shoulders sagged. His face was drawn and haggard, and in his eyes was a look of hopeless misery. She knew at once that something dreadful had happened, and she had a mad impulse to fling her arms about him on the spot and comfort him. But she controlled it. Too many curious eyes and ears around to stare and listen.

"I hope I haven't kept you waiting long," she managed to say with seeming casualness.

"Not very," Tom answered in a flat voice. "Shall we go to the Green Lantern?"

They made their way through sloppy streets, Tom contriving to shelter her beneath his umbrella despite the jostling crowd. He didn't speak, and at length she could bear his silence no longer.

"You aren't yourself, Tom. What has happened?" she faltered softly.

"I'll tell you all about it when we get out of this jam," was his tense reply. But his eyes were tender for her.

They found a vacant booth at the far end of the modest café where they dined together once or twice a week. Tom had little to say while they waited for their order, and Lyla watched him with growing uneasiness. How worn and miserable he looked!

Suddenly he raised his eyes to hers and she missed something which had always lighted them. It wasn't the love light, she told herself. No, they still held that. It was— She couldn't quite put it into words, but it reminded her of the gray skies, the cold drizzle that had made the day so dreary.

When the waitress had brought their dinner and gone, closing the half door after her, Tom squared his broad shoulders.

"You look so tired, Lyla dear. I wish this didn't have to be to-night," he said gently. "But it wouldn't be fair to you not to let you know how matters stand right away."

Lyla caught her breath. "Oh, Tom!" she gasped. "What is it?"

"You've heard me speak of my sister Ethel?"

She nodded.

"Yesterday afternoon she and her husband were both killed in an automobile accident."

"Oh, Tom!" Lyla's hand slipped across the table and his closed over it. Unmindful of the meal cooling before them, they sat silent for a long moment; he with averted face, she with eyes misty with tenderness.

"Are you going on to look after things?" she asked at length.

Tom shook his head.

"No. It costs so much that we can't both go, so it seemed best for mother to take the journey. There are two kiddies to be cared for, you see, a boy

of three and a baby girl of ten months. Men are so helpless with small children. They need a woman."

THERE was a long moment of silence. Words seemed so empty, so futile. Presently Lyla murmured: "Poor little tots. What is to become of them?"

"Mother will bring them home with her," Tom answered.

Again Lyla caught her breath. "You—you don't mean you're going to—to take care of them?" she faltered.

Tom lifted questioning eyes to hers. "What else is there to do?" he asked simply.

"But, Tom," she protested, trying to shake off the nameless fear that suddenly chilled her, "you can't do everything! There are homes for—"

Tom stopped her with a swift gesture. "My only sister's babies shall never go to an orphan asylum," he told her, and his tone was one of finality. "No, Lyla, I couldn't do that," he went on, the note of hopelessness creeping back into his voice once more. "As I see it, it's squarely up to me to look out for sister's kiddies. That's why I had to talk to you to-night, dear. To tell you that—that—"

He broke off, swallowing hard.

Under the table Lyla clasped her hands so tightly that the nails bit cruelly into the soft flesh. All the warm blood seemed suddenly to have drained out of her heart, leaving it numb with cold. Her beautiful dream of a little home where Tom should come to her at the end of the day—was it never to come true? Was it to be only a beautiful dream always?

From a long way off she heard Tom saying:

"I love you, Lyla—oh, my darling, how I love you! You must know that, for I couldn't help letting you see even though I wasn't in a position to ask you to marry me." He leaned across the table, a world of pain and heart hunger in his darkly circled eyes. "Since the first hour I met you I've dreamed of a little home where you would be waiting for me when the day's work was done," he breathed, "and I've hoarded every penny I could spare to that end. That's why I haven't taken you around more, dearest. Good places are so expensive, and I can't bear to see you in cheap ones. Just two or three more months and I could have asked you to be my wife. We'd have to live very simply, but we'd have managed all right—you're so wonderful! But this has come out of a clear sky and—and—"

He broke off, and she saw the muscles of his throat convulse. To see him suffer like that was more than she could bear. She buried her face in her hands while hot tears coursed down her cheeks.

Tom's voice, low and husky, broke the hush of the tiny compartment. "You can never know what it has cost me to let you go, sweetheart, but it's the only fair thing to do."

"No, no, Tom!" Lyla choked. "I'll keep right on working and we'll be able to—"

His hands swept across the table to imprison both hers. "Don't tempt me, dear," he pleaded. "You wouldn't be happy that way—not for long. You're the sort of girl who wants to have a real home—babies. If you weren't I shouldn't love you the way I do."

Deep down in her soul Lyla knew he had spoken the truth. "I can't eat. Let's go," she said, getting to her feet. Leaving an unfinished dinner, they went out into the bitter night, their

own young hearts as bleak as the driving storm.

WHEN at last they said good-by at the door of the lodging house where Lyla had a small back room three flights up, it was settled that they must go their separate ways.

Far into the night Lyla lay face down on her bed, sobbing her heart out. She was adrift now, utterly alone in life.

The week which followed for Lyla was one of despondency and fierce rebellion against an unjust fate. Each morning she went to Bloomfeld's and dragged through the day. Each night she returned to her solitary room to cry herself to sleep in the wee small hours.

At last she could endure it no longer. There must be a way for Tom and her to realize their dreams of happiness. There *had* to be! She must see him and make him agree to her plan. Lots of girls worked after they were married, and so could she. It wasn't just what she would choose, but anything was better than giving up Tom! She would telephone him and ask him to take her to the Green Lantern for dinner.

While she waited for his number her heart began to beat high with hope once more. Her hand trembled so she could hardly hold the receiver steady. Then—

"Mr. Denham is no longer here. He left the city yesterday," came an impersonal voice over the wire.

Things went suddenly black before her, and Lyla clutched the wall of the telephone booth for support. Tom—left the city—gone out of her life forever. She waited until she could control the sobs that threatened to burst from her lips, then stumbled from the booth and back to her counter.

AGAIN it was Saturday night, and Lyla was on her way from the store to her cheerless room. All day the girls at her counter had talked of prospective dances and chicken dinners at near-by suburban inns, and as she threaded her way through the hurrying crowd she caught glamorous snatches of talk from other girls eagerly anticipating an evening of pleasure. It seemed to her that only she in all the world had no one to care, no place to go to.

Tears were very near when a hand clapped her on the shoulder and a friendly voice cried: "H'loo, kid! You look as though you were shipwrecked on a desert island. What's on your mind?"

It was June Barker, a girl from Lyla's home town—the quiet country village upon which she had turned her back to seek her fortune in the big city when her father surprised her with a stepmother.

"Can't stop a minute! I'm dated for the midnight frolic at the Casino. Got to get home and doll up," June rattled on without waiting for an answer. "But say, come and have dinner with me! I've got the cutest little apartment at the Cliffcroft."

Lyla knew June Barker was in town, but they hadn't seen much of each other. June, though quite a bit older, was still young, pretty, and very vivacious. Back in their home town she had been considered a bit gay.

Lonely and dispirited, Lyla grasped at this opportunity for companionship. Over a hastily prepared meal in June's cozy breakfast nook, Lyla sobbed out the pitiful story of her shattered hopes.

"That's tough luck, girly," June sympathized lightly; "but it could be a lot worse, so cheer up. You're too young to get married yet a while anyway. Time enough to settle down when you've had a fling at life."

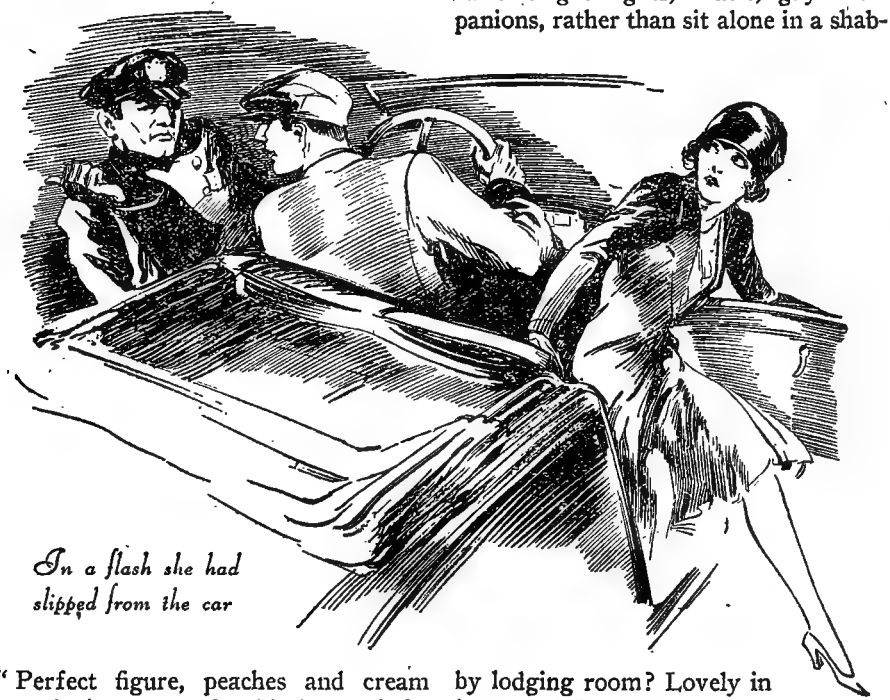
She studied Lyla critically.

"You're pretty," she conceded. "Perfect figure, peaches and cream complexion, mop of goldy-brown hair, and those overgrown hazel eyes—say, come and stay here with me for a while. Maybe I can jazz things up for you a mite. I know oodles of good catches."

"But I—I don't want to catch anybody," Lyla told her. "I just want my own darling Tom."

"Oh, you'll snap out of that!" June laughed. "Just watch me show you how easy it is to forget. I'm going to start in right to-night by taking you to the Casino with me. I've got an evening dress that 'll make you look like a million dollars, and it 'll just about fit you. It's too small for me. I'll call up my boy friend and tell him to bring his chum, Jack Lewis, along. You'll fall for Jack. He's a prince!"

What normal, fun-loving young girl would not choose to spend an evening amid bright lights, music, gay companions, rather than sit alone in a shabby lodging room? Lovely in borrowed finery, Lyla went to the Casino with June.



In a flash she had slipped from the car

The next afternoon she moved her belongings to June's homey little apartment. From then on she plunged into a whirl of excitement and pleasure.

JACK LEWIS, while not just her idea of a "prince," was a good-looking, breezy young man, who dressed in the height of fashion, and spent money as if it grew on trees. The moment he looked into her wistful hazel eyes he wanted her. He sent

her baskets of long-stemmed roses—which cost half as much as Tom Denham had earned in a whole week—and brought her huge boxes of expensive candy.

For the first time since she came to the city, Lyla dined at high-priced hotels and danced in their magnificent ballrooms. If, sometimes, while her feet moved to the strains of a plaintive waltz, her heart cried out for Tom and the softly shaded lights were suddenly blurred in a mist of tears, she resolutely put the thought of him from her mind. At such times she would become a bit too gay. Laugh on the slightest pretext. Keep up a steady stream of aimless chatter.

Showering attention on a penniless girl who is beautiful and eager for life and love, cannot fail to make an impression. Jack Lewis spared neither time nor money to win his way into Lyla's heart. His whirlwind courtship soon began to have its effect.

Why not try to care for Jack? she asked herself. Tom had dropped out of her life—gone without so much as a word of farewell. She began to treat Jack with less reserve.

IT was the night of the Colonial Ball at the Casino. In the living room Lyla stood by a small table, her face pressed close to a great bunch of hothouse violets that had just arrived by special messenger. She did not need to look at the attached card to know who had sent them.

"Aren't they gorgeous!" June exclaimed, coming up beside her. "Jack's mad about you, kid! Shouldn't wonder if he proposed—to-night, maybe. If he does, don't lose any time saying yes. It's your chance of a lifetime."

"I like Jack a lot, but I'm not sure I love him enough to marry him," Lyla murmured, her face still pressed to the violets.

"Bunk!" June snapped. "Jack Lewis has oodles of money! You'd be a fool to turn him down!"

"Money isn't everything," Lyla protested.

June caught her by the shoulder and swung her about. For a space they stared at each other in silence, Lyla wondering why she had never before noticed how hard and cynical the older girl's face was.

"Listen here, you little simp!" June sneered. "I tell you Jack Lewis is your chance of a lifetime. You don't have to stick any longer than you want to. These days it's about as easy to get untied as tied, and you'd come in for fat alimony. If you're too dumb to know which side your bread is buttered on, I'm through with you!"

And turning on her heel, June flounced out of the room.

Lyla sank down on the davenport. She was hardly more than seated when the telephone bell jingled, and she flew to answer it. Jack Lewis was at the other end of the line, and he sounded a good deal upset.

"I've been unexpectedly held up, but I'll be around for you in half an hour, and I've got something very special to say to you, little girl," he told her unsteadily.

While she waited for him to come, Lyla forced herself to look at the situation squarely.

After all, maybe June was right in declaring she would be a fool to turn Jack down.

"You would have everything but the happiness that can come only through true love," a still small voice whispered.

She sprang up and paced the room, trying fiercely to silence that small, in-

sistent voice. When the buzzer finally announced Jack's arrival, she hadn't hushed it altogether, but she hurried down to his waiting car with a brave attempt to appear gay and eager.

"You're like moonlight and roses, darling," he exclaimed as she climbed in beside him.

She saw that his face was flushed, and caught the odor of liquor as he bent toward her.

"We'll drive around till we spot a nice dark place to park. I've got to talk to you before we go to the dance," Jack said as they whirled away into the night.

Lyla's heart skipped a beat. Was it coming so soon? Well, let it come.

BENEATH a spreading evergreen in a side street, Jack brought the car to a stop.

He swayed toward her. "I'm in a deuce of a mess!" he complained. "My old man dropped in on me to-night and read the riot act. Says he's had enough of my playing around. Dad's fierce when he gets riled. He's arranged for me to leave town to-morrow morning. Got to chase out to B. C. and manage one of his branch houses there.

"But I can't go without you, sweetness," Jack went on a bit thickly. Suddenly he swept her into his arms, crushed his lips to hers in a long hard kiss. She felt the pound of his heart, saw a light no girl can mistake leap into his eyes.

"I'm crazy about you, girly!" he cried hoarsely. "Marry me right away—to-night! I can't wait any longer!"

Frightened, Lyla shrank away from him. "Oh, Jack! I—I can't. I'm—I'm not ready," she faltered.

He caught her to him again.

Trembling from head to foot, faint with nameless terror, yet not daring to resist or cry out, Lyla forced herself to endure his caresses. She knew now that she couldn't go through with her plan. But what should she do? It was worse than useless to argue with Jack. He was too intoxicated.

When at last he released her, she huddled in the far corner of the seat, her mind working feverishly as the car shot forward.

With no regard for the rights of pedestrians or other motorists, they tore along the streets. In vain Lyla strove to think of some means of escape. There were moments when, on the verge of despair, she even contemplated hurling herself to the road.

Racing at top speed, they reached the intersection of two arterial highways. The light called for a stop, but Jack Lewis paid not the slightest attention to it. Madly he raced on, and a minute later a traffic officer leaped on the running board.

The drinks Jack had taken had put him in anything but a placating mood. He promptly resented this interference and began a heated argument.

Lyla did not wait to see what the outcome would be. Here was her chance! Jack's back was turned toward her. If she were careful and quick—

In a flash she had slipped from the car and covered the distance to the sidewalk, where she was soon lost in the crowd which always collects at the first sign of any excitement.

AIMLESSLY Lyla wandered from street to street. Where should she go? Not back to June's place—no, June had made it very plain she would no longer be welcome there. She didn't want to go back, either.

Just then she chanced to glance across the street. Right opposite hung the big green lantern which marked the modest café where she and Tom Denham had dined together so often! An impulse to be alone in the little far-end booth they had always chosen surged through her.

The booth proved to be unoccupied.

Elbows on table, bowed head resting on clasped hands, Lyla closed her eyes. She could see Tom sitting across from her as he used to in happier days. Slow tears trickled from under her drooping lids. How empty life was! If only she could fall asleep here in this little place that held so many precious memories and never—

"Lyla! Lyla!"

She caught her breath. She must be dreaming—dreaming she heard Tom's voice calling her.

Suddenly a pair of arms were about her, pressing her close. She raised her head to look into Tom Denham's face. It was not the face which had haunted her with its misery and hopelessness ever since the day they parted. It was smiling now, alight with purpose and love.

"Tom! Oh, Tom!" she breathed.

Tom bent until his lips touched hers in a kiss so tender, so satisfying that every fiber of her thrilled to the sweet wonder of it.

"I'd almost begun to think I'd lost you, darling," he said softly. "The store was closed when my train got in, so I went to the house where you used to room, but the landlady told me you left there a month ago, and that she had been holding your mail, expecting you to call for it. Then I understood why I didn't get an answer to any of my letters."

Lyla drew a sharp breath.

"Oh, how many heartaches I might have spared myself if I'd only left a forwarding address at the post office," she cried. "It didn't occur to me that you would ever write to me, and I haven't any correspondents."

"Providence must have led me to take a chance on finding you here," Tom whispered. "Now that I have you once more, sweetheart, you shall never get away from me again."

"I don't want to—not ever." Lyla's voice was tremulous and she snuggled closer. "No matter how hard we have to struggle to get along, we'll do it together if—if you still want me," she murmured.

"Want you!" he echoed, and again his lips found hers.

"THE struggle isn't going to be so hard, either," he told her as they lingered over coffee and sandwiches. "It's a rather long story, but I'll cut it short. My sister's husband had been disinherited by his wealthy father because he refused to marry the heiress who had been picked for him. But when the old man learned of his son's death, he was filled with remorse, and hurried to make what amends he could.

"He met my mother, and quite naturally both of them wanted the kiddies. The upshot of the thing was that the old man—who isn't really very old, only fifty-five—asked mother if she would take him along with the kiddies, and she said she would! You see, they had come to like each other a lot!"

Tom leaned across the table to take Lyla's hand in both his.

"How soon can you be ready to marry me, dearest?"

"Just as soon as you can get the license, Tom," she murmured with shining eyes.

There was one way in which she could hold this fascinating man enthralled

A One-Man Girl

A death-bed promise bade a girl say "No" to the one man in all the world!

By Georgia Maxwell

ALLICE ran up to her room to get her newest, smartest sport coat.

Stanley Dane had asked her to go for a moonlight drive along the beach. Moonlight drives along the beach were as the sands of the sea in the gay young life of Allice. Drives and young men were all as much a part of the summer as moonlight and the beach itself.

But Stanley Dane! He had come from England on business, was her father's guest. Was leaving to-morrow night!

Stanley leaving—gone! She had known him only five days, yet the sudden realization of the house without him brought such a gasp of loneliness, such an aching helplessness, that it left Allice weak.

"You little idiot!" she addressed herself sternly in the mirror. "You

fool! You're acting like a girl who's never known a man, who's never been anywhere! He's—going back to England, and you're staying here, and you'll go right on playing around with your own bunch; right on playing tennis, riding, swimming; right on having the bunch here for dinners and dancing; right on flirting with—with Ted and Dick and—"

But the zest had gone out of it all! Last week all those things were simply great. Being the most popular girl in a perfectly dandy crowd, having an indulgent father who adored her, servants who worshiped her, had been marvelous.

"Mother said I was a one-man girl. She knew," Allice whispered to herself. "Yet she made me promise when she died that I'd not live anywhere else ever, except here with father, if I married. She didn't believe he could ever want to marry again, and she knew how lonely he'd be here alone. Why—I couldn't imagine him anywhere but here! But just the same, she shouldn't have made me promise. It—it wasn't fair."

FROM the instant Allice had met Stanley Dane, the other men she had known had all slipped into a hazy blur. They seemed childish, far away. During long, intimate dinners, she had listened, enthralled, as Stanley Dane told of big game hunts in Africa, of cruising Alaskan shores, of fishing in New Zealand. She had watched his slender brown fingers light a cigarette, had glowed with happiness as, perfunctorily, he had leaned to light hers.

She knew every line of his handsome, lean, patrician face, every thread of his smart English clothes. She memorized him as she used to memorize "Come into the garden, Maud," in school. She stayed awake nights memorizing him. She walked around the golf course when her father and he played golf, watched breathlessly his marvelous drives, his incredible putts.

Allice was a keen tennis player, the best in her crowd, but she was powerless before Stanley's crashing serves, helpless in his swift net play.

But in one way she excelled. In one way she held this fascinating dark-skinned young man enthralled. For hours he would sit silent, listening, his face grave with delight, as Allice, in the long, dimly lighted music room, played and sang to him. She did not have a big voice, but it was trained, and into her creamy contralto she put her heart. With the words of each song, she coquetted with him in gay French, was pensive with him in somber ballads, adored him in love songs of every country. He was her ideal, her knight in armor. And he was leaving for England to-morrow! She would never see him again!

But he had asked her to drive with him alone to-night. She would have that to remember always. She looked critically at herself in her long mirror, turned on all the lights so the least flaw might be detected. Her dark shining hair framed a serious little face now, the big blue eyes almost black with fervor. Her wisp of a yellow dinner dress frankly revealed for inspection and admiration her slender shoulders, her slim, girlish arms, her silken legs and little feet. She swallowed hard, speechlessly happy, as she went down the stairs, to be put into her low car.

Stanley did not speak as the car crunched out on the drive, into the main road. He lighted his cigarette, and in the flare of the match his face had a new expression. A look of determination and resolve.

"It's really lovely, isn't it?" Allice said, as the car ate up the miles. She bit her lip in vexation at saying anything so banal. How did this man manage to make her feel so self-conscious, make her feel so young, so naïve?

He laughed. "You're lovely. The lovliest little thing I ever saw."

With a wide sweep, he swung the car out under a tree, where the moon, coming up across the water, made a silver path to them and lighted up the softly foaming waves below on the sand.

"I scouted around this afternoon, and thought this was the place to tell you about it."

She drew a quick breath. She lovely—to him?

HE tossed away the cigarette, put a gentle arm about her. "You lovely little Allice—I'm mad about you! You must know that. I've stayed days when I should have stayed hours. You know why. You will marry me?"

Marry him! He was asking her to *marry* him! He wasn't leaving her. He was going to be with her always! He was drawing her closer, closer, then his cheek, his darling brown cheek, was against hers.

"You darling!" his lips said softly, before they turned hungrily to hers.

"Oh, wait, wait!" she cried. She could not bear it, this sudden suffocating nearness.

He drew back to look down at her. "You don't love me? You think—you couldn't?"

"I adore you," her voice was a frightened whisper. "Oh, I adore you!"

"Adore me?" His eager smile lighted up his tanned face. "Well, then!" He swept her into his arms, kissing her till she was breathless, till she could bear the sweet agony of it no longer.

"Wait!" Again she tried to draw away, but as he released her she could not bear that, either. She threw her arms about his neck, gave him ardor for ardor. Her blood was a racing fire, her body tense. And with each pressure of his arms, each mad kiss, he whirled her along this dizzy path of love toward a precipice.

She would go over it. She knew she would, if he did not hold them both back. She and he would be hurled into some blind, delicious whirl, where there was no longer sane judgment, where only emotion ruled. He was her lover, her lord, her man!

"No," she drew away from his eager lips, her cheeks flaming. "You—mustn't go so fast, my dear, my dear."

"Say it," he exulted. "Say 'Stanley.' You haven't, once."

"'Stanley,'" she repeated, shyly. Hadn't she called him that to herself all these five days she had carefully said, "Mr. Dane"?

"Come here, you beauty, you darling," he cried, his eyes burning down into hers. "Do you think a taste is enough?" His hand ran down her bare arm, firmly closed on her fingers. It was as if a soft flame had slipped along the flesh. She looked up in wonder at his eager face. She could not stand it—this fire that was devouring her. She could not, yet she yearned again for his arms.

"Things are better tasted," she managed a shaky little laugh. "You mustn't be—greedy, Stanley."

He chuckled, looked down at her admiringly. "When will you marry me, Allice?" Suddenly he was grave. "Don't make me wait. I won't wait!" His mouth was stubborn. "You are

tantalizing, but you aren't cruel. You will come to England with me—soon?"

"To—England?"

"Of course. You know I live there."

"But we must live here, with father. He's all alone. When mother died last year she made me promise I'd never leave him."

"Well, you'll go right along to England, darling, with your husband."

Her husband!

"But I can't. You see, his business is here."

"And mine is in England. You will come with me."

"But I—can't, Stanley! I've just told you, dear." She felt cold with the terror that was closing over her. "I must stay with father. I promised."

"You know you'll come with me." Again she was swept off her feet with his ardor. "'*Your people shall be my people, your gods—*'"

"Ah, don't! I've told you I can't leave father!"

"YOU don't love me! Sternly he took her hands from her face. Gently he kissed her, as the tears ran down her cheeks. "Or of course you'd come with me. A woman lives with the man she loves, no matter where. It's always been so, since time began. It always will."

"I'd go anywhere with you, anywhere," she answered brokenly, "if I had only myself to think of. But as long as father lives—"

"As long as he *lives!* Why, darling, your father is a young man!"

"I must stay," she insisted faintly.

She felt exhausted, detached, alone in some dreadful void where no one could reach her. Wonderful Stanley was right here beside her, yet she was alone in a sad, forlorn circle where he could not come to her.

"But—you'll wait for me?" she asked. Then, as he did not reply, she turned and put both pleading hands on his shoulders. "Stanley," she gasped in terror at his silence, "you will wait?"

"No," he answered stubbornly, "of course I won't. You'll go with me—soon, or I'm leaving for England tomorrow night. And not coming back."

"No!" She looked at him in frantic appeal. "Oh, you wouldn't, you couldn't!"

"To-morrow night!"

He was adamant.

And all the rest of that night, while the moon, sinking into the sea, threw strange, eerie shadows on the walls of Allice's bedroom, and long after the moon was gone, she lay tense, suffering, in her bed. Hour by hour, struck off by the great clock on the landing—the clock that had told off all her happy little-girl days, all the long, happy evenings of her girlhood—Allice stared up at the ceiling while the dappled leaf shadows moved slowly across it.

She could almost feel Stanley's arms about her. She wished, while a hot blush rushed over her, she could know them now, here. Her head turned restlessly, as if to let his lips slip again to her neck, to feel the delicious, breathless thrill of his kisses.

He would be gone. She would be left. Left alone forever. For she knew she was a one-man girl, knew she would never love again as she loved Stanley now. And knew she would never, could never, give herself without love.

Through her mind rushed a picture of all the unmarried women she knew, and she ached in sympathy for them all. She would be one of them. Probably each had had a Stanley in her life. She could see herself going down

across the years, hair silvering, as she took tender care of her father, as he became feebler and feebler. Could see herself living a quiet, lonely life when he was gone.

She wanted Stanley! Tears slipped down her cheeks, as that picture irised out into the vivid memory of this evening. She wanted his arms, his lips. She wanted to live with him, make a home for him, be a pulsing, necessary part of his life, merge with him into one wonderful, glorious life together.

AT last the night dragged itself through to a reluctant dawn. The great clock down on the landing told the household it was six, seven, eight, just as if it were any morning in the world, except the most dreadful morning in all the world. Stanley was going to-day!

Allice, even after a stingingly cold shower, plenty of rouge, and attired in her smartest morning dress, felt wan, drained of all joy. How could she meet Stanley? What would he say?

She saw him down in the garden and went slowly, almost reluctantly to him, yet as inevitably as if he were a magnet drawing her. He had just broken off a long red rose, a lovely, dewy, partly opened bud. At her step, he turned, smiled.

Allice's heart turned over at that smile.

"I was finding one that was just like you." He held it out. Allice took it, looked down speechlessly at the lovely, dewy, perfect bud. It was partly closed, partly open, its petals exquisite, uncurling.

"And here's one for me." He pulled off another, this one fully opened. "Put it in my buttonhole, darling."

Allice reached up to his lapel. At the touch of the rough tweed, the faint odor of tobacco that clung to him, she felt weak.

"And the answer is—yes?" Eagerly he put his hands on her shoulders, drew her to him. "You've thought it all over, and you know we belong to each other?"

She drew away, shook her head, but could not take her eyes from his. "No. I—can't, Stanley. I—promised. There's no way out! But—you won't go to-night? You'll stay?"

"To-night, at midnight." His lips drew into a firm, stubborn line. "I want you more than anything in this world. But I go to-night. And if you love me—"

"Don't!" she cried. "Don't say that. I do. You know I do!"

They went into the house silent, and breakfast, even with Allice's father his usual charming self, was a difficult meal.

The day flew, each hour bringing midnight and Stanley's train nearer, nearer. She longed to be alone with Stanley, yet dreaded to, and there seemed no opportunity. Guests, phone calls, business conferences kept them apart, or prevented their talking together.

Even at dinner they were not alone. Dr. Banks, his young wife, and Mrs. Langely were their dinner guests. It was after dinner that the doctor drew Allice out onto the porch, leaving the others in the music room with their coffee.

"Show me your roses, Allice," he requested, as he slipped her hand through his arm. Reluctantly she started down the path with him. Why could she not have been here with Stanley? Yet she could not go through another scene with him. She hadn't the strength.

"Look here, Allice," the doctor's

keen eyes appraised her sharply, "do you know what you're doing?"

"What I'm doing?"

"Don't think I don't see it all. I've seen what was happening ever since that splendid young Englishman stepped into this house. He's in love with you. You're in love with him. Then what's the matter? He's going in an hour or two, and you look like a stricken fawn. I shot one once, and I'll not forget its eyes, as I found it in the woods, wounded. What's the matter? Come clean now, child. He isn't married, is he?"

"Married? Stanley? Oh, no!"

"Well, then, what is it?"

"You should know." Her hands clenched tight. "You heard my mother before she died."

"Heard her—what?" His voice was suddenly low, ominous.

"Heard her ask me to promise I'd never leave father. If I married, I'd live here with him."

"Oh." He blew out a breath in vast relief. "Is that all? And the Englishman doesn't choose to live here? Of course not."

"So you see—"

"And you'll live over there?"

"No. I—promised."

"Allice! You little fool!" Peremptorily, the doctor put his hands on her shoulders, shook her gently. "You little idiot! You wouldn't let a death-bed promise—"

"*What!* Not respect a—"

"Certainly not! A death-bed promise is no promise. No one has a right to exact a promise under such stress. I say the sooner such a promise is broken, the better. Like taking off the wedding ring the instant the ceremony is over. Just for a minute of course. Then the spell of superstition is broken."

"But—"

"Your mother, child, was a lovely but selfish woman. She adored your father. He adored her. She couldn't bear to think of any other woman in her place. If he had been the one to go, she'd have married again. It isn't right for a man as young as your father not to have a wife. He needs one. And, with you gone, he'll have one. Have you noticed him with Mrs. Langely lately? Come here."

Softly the two crept up beneath the music room windows. The doctor's wife was looking over a magazine beneath a big lamp. Stanley was not in the room. Mrs. Langely was at the piano, playing softly. Allice's father was leaning over her, talking eagerly. The lovely blond woman was smiling up at him, and on their faces—

A great surge of unbelievable hope rushed over the girl. But again came that memory of her mother—great wistful eyes—

"Oh, I couldn't. She trusted me!"

"She wanted to hold him!" Again the crisp voice, stern with decision, as they walked back down a path. "And it isn't right to hold a person beyond the grave. No one has that right! In life, yes. In death, *no*. The promise must be given, of course. But not kept—not held as an obligation. No human being has that power over another. Happiness is your birthright, child. It belongs to you, and you must take it. It won't pursue you. I know you. You are an idealist, a—well, what is known as a one-man girl."

"Oh—that's what my mother said!"

"And you would hold a man in your heart, and never see another as long as you lived. You'd go down across the years—"

"Ah, don't! And you think I should go with Stanley?"

"Of *course!* Don't let this slip through your fingers, child. You're too lovely not to be a wife—a mother. You haven't the right to waste yourself like that. See, there he is on the porch, looking for you. I'll slip in this way. Go to him!" He gave her a little push.

She went slowly up the path, up the steps, where Stanley stood waiting. His eyes were dark with anger.

"Where have you been?" he demanded. "Walking in the garden with that—"

"Please, Stanley." She was all but crying, yet she exulted in his flare of jealousy.

"I must be getting off." His voice was cold. "I came out to say good-by."

"Could we—couldn't you drive me out—along the beach, for a few minutes?"

"Perhaps." He whipped out his watch, glanced at it. "For a half hour, I think I can. But—is there any use prolonging the agony?"

Allice did not answer. She was shaking as he put her again into the low seat. They did not speak as the car roared out the drive and into the same road they had taken last night.

"Please—in the same spot." She put out a quick hand, as he would have driven past the great, spreading tree.

With a grinding of brakes, the car slid to a stop. He hesitated, as he looked down at her. His mouth was grim, but gradually his face softened. Then, as quickly, flared with desire.

"Do you, or don't you, love me?" he demanded. He held her tight, kissed her gently, then passionately, till her veins seemed to be running fire, scorching every part of her body with delicious flame. "Do you?"

She looked up into the stern face so near hers, the dark eyes glowing, the lips twitching. "You know I do," she answered faintly. "Oh, you know I do!"

"How much do you?" Again the arms tightened, hurting her, thrilling her.

She felt herself answering his call. Here was her man. She was his. Nothing now could keep them apart. Her hands trembled as she drew the loved head down.

"Oh, Stanley," she gasped, "I love you—I love you enough to break a promise to my dead mother. I'll go to England with you, dear. I'll go!"

Again they were mad, quite mad, as love swept away the car, the moonlight, the waves softly slushing on the beach below, the very world itself, and left them alone in a charmed and magic circle of enchantment.

CINDERELLA ON BROADWAY

By BEULAH POYNTER

In the next issue. On the stands January 22

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

Girls' clubs or organizations in New York or vicinity may secure Mr. Fraser's services for an evening's lecture by addressing him care this magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City.

HUNDREDS of appreciative letters come to me every day from grateful readers; but just as many hundreds of readers receive my analysis and do not bother to send me that little token of friendship—a letter of thanks.

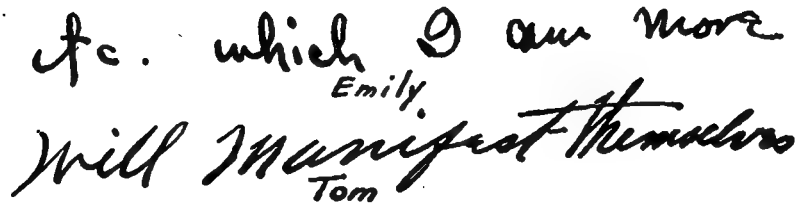
I know that these unknown friends have in their hearts an unspoken "thank you" for me—that some, perhaps, have got a better view of life through what I tell them—but how much better I would feel if I might hear them say so! This would, indeed, be a thankless task if it were not for personal contacts with my readers.

I want to be the friend of all of you, and we may as well be chummy about

it! As Robert Browning says, "the little more, how much it is; the little less, and what worlds away!"

So write to me whether you want to thank or criticize. I'll thank you for it!

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS



(Miss Emily W., Scranton, Pennsylvania.) Your straightforward questions about your sweetheart's possibilities in the show business, and your own ideas of courtship and marriage, gave me something of a kick. It's quite obvious to me, Emily, that all your thinking is home cooked. That is to say, you don't depend upon the say-so of other people for your opinions. In fact, you are somewhat masculine in your ideas at times. Whatever I could say to you in reply to your problems, I'm afraid you would remain unconvinced. In view of this fact, for the present I'll confine myself to what I see in your handwritings, and let you work out your own salvation. I'm a hundred per cent Scotch, and rather backward in coming forward when I meet a woman with such advanced ideas as you have. In the first place, you are in your right niche. You are a born writer, and certainly have pronounced and dogmatic views of life. Your "T" bars scattered throughout your letter resemble spears and arrows stabbing their way into the heart of every looped letter as it comes along. This is symbolic of your thinking. And when it comes to love, courtship and marriage, you act pretty much as you write. Tom's handwriting is that of a man who knows his way about in the world. He is a cultured fellow, and one who is likely to succeed. He is strong-willed and passionate, and expects his own way all the time. My humble opinion is, natures like yours and Tom's are never happy when cribbed, cabined and confined, and for you two to get married would be like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire.

(Miss Charlotte E., Paterson, New Jersey.) After reading your letter twice over, I proceeded at once to look for your sweetheart's weaknesses, or for something in his nature that might be the cause of his misbehavior. The result of my diagnosis must be rather unsatisfactory to you, since you main-

tain "he is far from being a gentleman." My contention is, Charlotte, that he is a very live and red-blooded fellow. A man who is very emotional, and quick in his judgment of men, women, and things. I observe that he is a very conservative chap, and does not care for lots of palaver. He is impatient, as well as frugal with his money. He is inclined to be indiscreet as well as flirtatious. In a word, he belongs to the type who like to sow their wild oats and find out for themselves what's good and what's bad in this old world. Sooner or later, such a nature comes back to its own level. That's what your George will do in a year or two. The "whoopee parties" you mention are part and parcel of this inside knowledge he thirsts for at the present time. He is by nature "nosey," and consequently is determined to know the why and the wherefore of everything that comes his way. If I mistake not, you are not much given to emotionalism. You take your love-making in a rather matter of fact way. There are not many rapturous moments in your young life, even with George around. You are what the men might classify as a "cold baby." If I were you I would think twice before I spoke once when George asks you to marry him. I question if you two young people would ever see eye to eye about anything, so why take a chance?

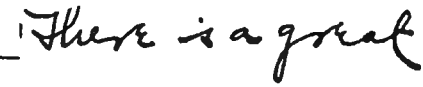
———⚜———

ological analysis of my writing
Marian
Tuesday noon, was indeed interested
James

(Miss Marian W., Carthage, Mississippi.) Without the slightest hesitation I would call you a well-mated pair. Both of you have got an ample supply of common sense, and your education should be the means of enabling you to help each other in business matters as well as in matrimonial affairs. Your question as to whether a girl should continue working after she is married is a moot problem to-day. I'm sorry to say, the answer seems to be yes with girls in all walks of life. In my own courting days, a young man wasn't worth his salt who expected his bride to help out with the finances. If he wasn't able to provide the girl with all the comforts that she was accustomed to, the question of matrimony was deferred, and rightly so. Not so to-day, however. The chivalry of the men of the present generation doesn't measure up to Scotch standards of responsibility of a generation ago, with the result that real home life is unknown to many a young couple. To come to your own case, Marian, I grant you that your salary of fifty dollars a week is nothing to be sneezed at, and ought to help considerably in building up your bank account. On the other hand, that same two hundred dollars a month might be more of a curse than a blessing to James, since I notice in his handwriting a tendency to indolence, and an inclination to follow the path of least resistance. A young man, before he thinks of marriage, should insist upon shouldering the whole responsibility. Personally, I'm against those delicatessen marriages, and this is my answer to your question.

ANALYZE YOUR OWN HANDWRITING

PERSONS MAKING THEIR FINAL STROKES LIKE THESE—



are generally unreasonable and stubborn. They like to have their own way all the time, and are not easy to live with. Obstinacy and a stiff-necked adherence to certain opinions predominate in such personalities.

IF YOU MAKE YOUR SMALL "B" LIKE THIS—

you are sure to have the courage of your convictions. You possess a distinctive individuality. You have also lots of originality, and your ideas are always practical and businesslike.

IF YOU WRITE LIKE THIS—

you are sure to have a lot of "Scotch" in you. You are thrifty, and expect value for your money. You never get much joy out of life, because you are too much of a tightwad to be really happy.

IF YOUR BEGINNING STROKES ARE LIKE THESE—

it simply means that you have very little patience when slow people are around you. You do things quickly yourself, and you expect other folk to be as smart as you are.

WHEN "T'S" AND "D'S" ARE LOOPED LIKE THESE—

there is indication that the person is supersensitive and touchy over the merest trifles. Their feelings are easily wounded, and they cannot stand criticism. Talking and gossip are also an obsession with them.

ARE YOUR "T" BARS LIKE THIS ONE?

If so, you have a nasty temper, and are always ready to say mean things. You like to show off, and are inclined to be self-important. You are ambitious in a spasmodic way, and somewhat temperamental in your manner.

at Altoona could have been.
Fannie

The weather has been pleasant for the
Robert

(Miss Fannie E., Laconia, New Hampshire.) I cannot understand why Robert puts up with your tantrums as he does. Apart from your handwriting altogether, the contents of your letter gave me a good insight as to how the wind blew. My opinion is that you are a "spoiled" girl. You want everything your way. You expect everybody to be at your beck and call. You like to think that your word is law. Now, Fannie, let me tell you that the "mailed fist" is never a passport to a human heart. Selfishness has never yet been known to bring peace on earth, or good-will between men and women. You require much more of the milk of human kindness in your nature before you can ever hope to be even a good citizen, let alone being an ideal lover. If Robert ever marries you, he will have a hard time with you unless you change your tactics. In your present frame of mind, you would insist on being the head of the household, and expect Robert to play second fiddle all the time. His affection would go to seed not only with neglect, but with that nasty carping nature of yours which colors your whole personality. You may think this an unjust criticism of your character, but it is only the result of my examination of your penmanship. Of course, you have several redeeming qualities, like the rest of us. For example, you are logical and straightforward in your dealings with other people. You have a wide outlook on life, and are splendidly suited for a position which requires leadership. Apart from that, I wonder if you are a girl who is capable of making a real happy love nest for a man? Try to think for others, Fannie.

and this letter I am now writing.
Dorothy

was written when he was physically and mentally
Harry

(Miss Dorothy T., Chicago, Illinois.) Your delightful letter, with the amount of detail you gave concerning yourself and Harry, made interesting reading. So you are twenty-eight years of age, Dorothy, and "five foot eight and a half inches in your stocking feet, white, and an American." Why didn't you send me your photograph and give me a real good time? In all seriousness, I want to tell you, Dorothy, that you are a fine sample of womanhood. Clean-cut and up-standing. The sort of girl who makes a fine mother and a conscientious wife. You are certainly a fit companion for Harry, who, by the way, is not far behind you in manly qualities. He is a cultured fellow, as well as being considerate in his manners and actions. Of course, when it comes to sentimentality he is not as ardent as you are. He is far from be-

ing overwhelming in his love-making, and his quick mind swings more to educational matters than to heart problems. You, on the other hand, impress me as a girl who has a real zest in living, full of enthusiasm and thoroughly acquainted with men and things. There are three things, however, that you would be well advised to be careful about before you go any farther. The first is your temper. In keeping with the rest of your characteristics, it bubbles over quite often, and gets unmanageable. And to make matters worse, you speak very fast when you are in a rage, which means that your tongue resembles a runaway horse, and, like the horse, you are only making a fool of yourself. The second trait that requires watching is your propensity to egotism, and your third is your want of patience with slow people. If you take care of these, I can vouch that you two young folk will be very happy when married.

YOUR CAREER

I feel sure it is me

(Miss Laura A., Troy, New York.) I'm sorry to say, Laura, that I don't believe you have much ambition to get on in the world. Your outlook is not as wide as it should be. You are by nature lazy and easy-going, and as a result you have no vision or objective in life. As to a career, or vocation, I am at a loss to advise you as to what would be best for you. Your opinionative manner is apt to drive people away from you, and your temper is nothing to be proud of. These characteristics are hindrances to success, and should be carefully watched. Thank goodness, Laura, I see many commendable traits in you. I believe you would be very logical in your thinking, very honest in your dealings, and conscientious to a degree when any job was intrusted to you. You have a constructive mind, though it is a slow-working one. You are sincere, though you may have a reserved exterior. In the matter of advice as to a position, I would say there might be an opportunity for you in the field of domestic science. This, of course, would require special training over a considerable period, but that very fact might be the means of instilling into you an ambition which at present is not there. I believe you could be interested in this kind of work, and the chances are that it would be the making of you. Think this over.

Here are two specimens

(Miss Laura T., San Francisco, California.) I would hesitate to advise you about spending money or time in the hope of becoming a moving picture actress. In common with most girls of your age—nineteen—the silver screen has a strong fascination for any one who has the idealism that you possess. As to your voice, I can only take your word for it, and probably it is quite suitable for the "talkies." Of course, I see no reason why you should not be the success in Hollywood you expect to be. It is all a matter of perseverance and determination of purpose; and, by the way, you have been endowed with both. The road to success in the motion picture business is long and devious, and don't forget, it is not always merit and talent that are recognized by the magnates of movieland. They are a law unto themselves when it comes to choosing talent, and from this very fact the most unexpect-

ed things happen in the studios of Hollywood. So, you see, it's not all gold that glitters, even in the realm of motion pictures. I would be the last one in the world to discourage you, Laura, but if I were you, I would turn my attention to some other vocation for the time being. You should do well in interior decorating. Your artistic tastes, coupled with your creative power, plus your practical ideas about things, all point to your success in this line of work. Now think this over, will you?

(Miss Catherine M., Ann Arbor, Mich.) You appear to be a cultured girl with the advantage of a good education. You seem to be a very free and easy sort of person. Big-hearted and extremely motherly. I'm well aware of the fact, Catherine, that you are not married, but nevertheless the fact remains that you're built that way. You can't help being kindly and considerate to all who come along. In a word, you are a womanly girl who is going through life scattering sunshine and joy wherever you go. In the way of a little vocational guidance, I would say you are specially cut out for a business which brings you in contact with all sorts and conditions of people. I am thinking particularly of the tea-room business, where you would have an opportunity to display your tact and your cultural tastes. Since you have been blessed with a voice that holds a smile in it all the time, your services would be invaluable in a tea-room of your own or as a hostess. By your winning manner you would ingratiate yourself into the hearts of satisfied customers, and build up a substantial clientele. In pointing out your weak characteristics, I would begin with your tendency to procrastinate. Fortunately it is only a tendency with you and not a habit, so let us hope that you'll grow out of this before you are much older. I feel you have a wonderful opportunity to succeed in the business world, and I wish you the best of luck.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(Hazel H., Flint, Michigan.) Your widespread pen strokes indicate that there is no Scotch in your nature. No husband will ever be able to call you a thrifty lassie, or one who is saving for the proverbial rainy day. Your propensities run in another direction. You are somewhat extravagant in your tastes, and unthoughtful in your giving. It's evident you have never been taught the real value of money, and consequently you are a poor administrator of your own or of other people's capital. I would class you as a very diplomatic sort of person. You are reserved, and would seldom be guilty of expressing your opinion before others. I have purposely dwelt on your weaknesses in order that you may take a tumble to yourself and start right away being human. You have the makings of a fine, clean-cut woman, and with a little care and patience you may be a splendid example to many of your sisters who have not got your intuitive and inherent qualities.

(Martha B., Wilmington, Delaware.) You impress me at once as a girl who is rather self-important, and

who is given to ceremony and palaver. On the other hand, your penmanship discloses a pronounced strain of prudence and logic. You are not a girl who is prone to rely, in the usual feminine fashion, on your intuition alone. You really think things out for yourself. You have good judgment, and your thinking can always be counted on as being constructive. But you have a tendency to fly from one thing to the other. Regarding your imagination, you must have been in the front seat when that characteristic was given out. You have a superabundance of it, which I'm glad to see you use to good advantage. In other words, your daydreams and visions are converted into concrete and worth-while achievements. I would say that you are one of those interestingly candid people who do so much to leaven the dull lump of humanity. In fact, you are a little too outspoken at times. Don't forget there's a time to speak and a time to be silent. You should look for the happy medium, and you'll never be sorry for what you've said. To come to your weaknesses: first of all, you are a very touchy individual. The least thing upsets you, being easily hurt by supposed or actual slights. Your vanity also spoils a lot of your charm and individuality. Remember, a conceited person is never popular in this world, and you will very soon discover that you are no exception to this rule. Your temper is by no means angelic, and as for patience, you don't seem to know what that is. Of course, you are still young and plastic enough to change your manners and mode of thinking, and if I were you I would do so at once.

Girls' clubs and organizations in New York and vicinity can secure the services of John Fraser by writing to him care of this magazine. An evening's entertainment and instruction of surpassing interest is provided by Mr. Fraser's analyses.

If you belong to a club suggest to the other members that they set aside a meeting to be addressed by Mr. Fraser. Vocational problems of the members can be solved by having this expert in graphology analyze handwriting specimens. Simply address him care ALL-STORY, 280 Broadway, New York City.

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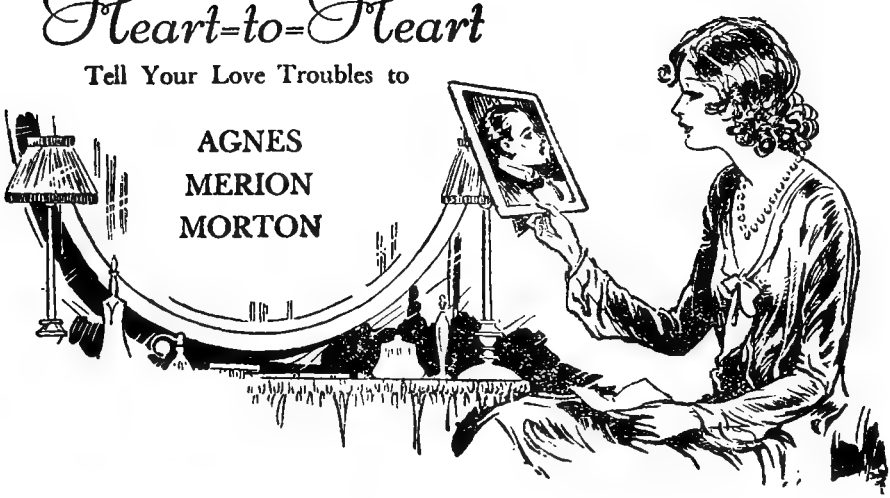
MERION
MORTON



MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

AMONG the letters which came to "Slave Wife" was one which, we feel, will help and interest others besides herself. The writer went to a great deal of pains in composing it and I want to begin by expressing my appreciation of his having done so.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

It so happened I picked up ALL-STORY magazine in the club to-night, and read, as I very seldom do, "Heart-to-Heart." I became interested in the letter from "A Slave Wife." I do not try to solve her problem, but will write from cases similar during my work as a welfare investigator. Differing from the usual welfare worker, I am a man.

It is fairly easy to put the husband in question under the classification of a mental case, or else his wife has unconsciously given him some grounds to lead him to suspect that she is untrue.

The case of P. in a small city of Illinois: P. was a very good husband so far as providing was concerned. A personal friend of mine up till he married. After his marriage I called to pay my respects to his wife, a woman I had never seen. After formal introductions he sent his wife from the room and then abused me in such vile language I immediately broke off a friendship of long standing. Later I heard of similar incidents. Mrs. P. stood for these things until, like the husband of the Slave Wife, Mr. P. took her shoes and clothes away from her and locked her in their home, a prisoner. Allowing no one to visit her, not even his people.

Here the welfare people were called in and it was necessary to place Mr. P. under a peace bond. His wife is now very happy with him, and we have resumed our friendship of former years. Mr. P. had no apparent cause for his actions—only an insane jealousy.

Men and women of this caliber cannot be dealt with by reason. They must be shown by severe handling that they cannot interfere with other's liberties, even though that person be their wife. Timid wives and even husbands suffer long before they finally ap-

peal to court for their rights, especially in small communities where the suffering one wishes to escape neighborhood gossip. Very seldom does a jealous person come to his right senses without being forced.

Another case: Mrs. B. suffered long and without complaint from excessive jealousy on her husband's part. She left him, but he followed and brought her back to their home by threats. He made life miserable for her by his continued false accusations until finally the poor woman, driven nearly distracted, bought a whip and when he showed signs of jealousy administered a whipping. Mr. B. is now a very considerate husband.

There is no law in this country, regardless of the size of the community, that will countenance a man's browbeating his wife. I do not approve of Mrs. B.'s method, it is not workable in every case, but an appeal to the court—having the husband placed under bond to keep the peace—quite often has the desired results.

Slave Wife's childhood environment no doubt sapped her courage. She needs this above everything else. She has been in subjection such a long time that it will be difficult for her to do anything alone. If her husband is so dangerous that she fears for her life, then she should waste no time in appealing to the courts for protection. This method cannot fail and should bring her husband to his senses, if he possesses any. Now threats to a man of this mental derangement are of little value. It takes quick, decisive action, even if Slave Wife must go to court in her bedroom slippers. They will go far to convince the court that strenuous means are necessary. Mrs. P. went with a bathrobe and coat—nothing more, not even slippers.

I hope this may be the means of cutting the cruel fetters binding an apparently worthy woman to an insane man, and yet that it may bring that man to realize that he is wrong.

JUST "TIM."

Let me thank you again for your letter, "Tim," and say that in my opinion you *have* solved Slave Wife's problem in the best possible way, if she will only brace up and take your advice.

The next letter has a most original suggestion to offer—and who shall say that it is not practical?

DEAR SLAVE WIFE:

If I had a husband like yours I think I'd take a sash weight to him, or else use slow poison. But since you seem to be a gentle, timid soul, perhaps that seems too harsh, so I'll tell you what to do. Wait until pay night and then give him a good stiff dose of jalap. (Do you know what that is? Miss Allen can get it for you at the drug store.) It will make him deathly sick, and while he is being sick you go through his pockets and beat it with the money.

WELL WISHER.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am writing to you for help. I have been going with a fellow for three years. I am sure I love him. But there is another fellow who comes around and I go out with him. I don't love him; but I like his company. You see, he is a fellow who likes to dance and go to parties, which I do, too, where my steady doesn't like to dance and he gets so mad when I go. I don't like to hurt him, so please help me, and tell me frankly what to do.

MIXED-UP.

So long as you are not engaged to your "steady," there is no reason why you should not go out with other boys. Why should a girl make all the concessions? I advise you to jolly him a little. Say to him, "You know I'd rather go with you if you would take me." Your town is near enough to a good-sized city where he could learn to dance if he would take the trouble, and if it is a big enough object with him. I believe he would like to if he knew how to dance well, for people usually enjoy doing what they do well. If he is not willing to give you the sort of pleasure you like, he must not quarrel with you for accepting it from others.

It is usually a mistake for a girl to give up too much for any one man. Read what happened in another case:

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I'm a girl of twenty-two, and always had a lot of friends and good times. I never was crazy about the boys and hated petting parties, *et cetera*. Just two years ago I met a certain fellow who had wanted for a long time to meet me, but I didn't know of it until my brother, who worked with him, told me he was going to bring him down.

This fellow was very shy and at first wouldn't even want to be in the room alone with me. He came down three times a week. I felt bad for him at first and tried to get him in my crowd. As I could never teach him to dance, he was left alone a lot, as I always had a partner. We dropped the crowd and just went about together to shows, on long walks, and so on, until I noticed he was beginning to be less shy and more like the other boys. I never let him spend much

money on me, as I don't like to have fellows spend money on me.

Well, we went on like that for a year, then he started to make love to me. Of course, I let him, as I had grown to care for him very much. We have been so happy together, but he never mentioned getting married, although I had heard from my brother he wanted to. One thing I couldn't understand was he always said I shouldn't bother with him but should go with guys with money, for he would love to see me have everything. But I would always laugh and tell him money wasn't everything.

Last week he came down and, instead of going out, he wanted to stay in. I thought it queer, but said nothing. He was very affectionate, but I could see something was bothering him. When it was nearly time for him to go he said he wasn't coming to see me any more. I felt terrible and asked why. He said that he had always wanted me for his wife, but that he could never give me what he would like me to have, so he was going to stop seeing me as he couldn't stand it. We both cried when he left. Gee, it is terrible to see a man cry. Anyway, he hasn't been here since.

I have never given him reason to think I would make an expensive wife, as I can cook and keep house very nicely, as I have had the full run of my home for a long while now. He also gave reasons, such as he would rather wait until he was twenty-nine or thirty before he could get married, for he has never been around much, and he wants me to go with other men. It seems terribly hard now for me, as I have nobody but my young sisters to go with, for I gave up the old crowd for him. Do you think I should wait for him or should I try to find another to take his place? Although I know it will be hard to find one. What can I do, for I hate to be always

ALONE.

Dear girl, I don't believe you will always be "alone." When your old friends learn that you are no longer monopolized by this one man they will begin to come around again, particularly if you do your part by being nice to them when you meet them on the street or at entertainments. The young man in question has acted with a mixture of selfishness and nobility—at least, I suppose he imagines he is being "noble." Feeling as he did, he should have kept away from you before you grew to care for him and before you gave up your other friends, but it is hard to keep away from a person we like, and young unmarried men do not look at things from the girl's point of view. If his affection for you is strong enough, he will be back, but when he comes I hope you will not devote yourself solely to him again. Get something to do; cultivate your old friends; make new ones. Gradually but surely you will work out of this unhappiness, and whatever fate has in store for you will be all the more deeply appreciated by you because of this experience.

I am glad you allowed me to print your letter because it may serve to warn little Mixed-up and other girls in similar situations.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I want to ask you about some friends of mine, not boys but girls. They are of the foolish girlish kind. I will call them Thelma and Elspeth. We run around quite a lot together. Elspeth is most insulting. She is the kind you must give back to her as good as she sends. She loves to go over to Thelma's and dance. I was never raised to being out late—dad doesn't approve of it. And so I always have to come home early, but Elspeth stays on. Several times dad has put his foot down and made me stay in, and he has told the girls that I cannot go certain places. He has told them things for their own good, to which Elspeth has made insulting replies, so dad has turned against her. And Thelma is getting to be more like her. She has a temper which shows her up when in action.

Mrs. Morton, my feelings are often hurt by these girls. Elspeth bosses Thelma, but she can't boss me. They are not true friends to each other, for as soon as one is away from the other they talk about each other to me. And they do the same by me, I know. Can you tell me what to do to keep these girl friends?

GLADYS.

I don't understand why you want to keep friends of the type you describe. They both sound more or less incapable of true friendship. Thelma might be all right if she was by herself, for she seems easily led in either direction. Since she chooses to go with Elspeth you'd be better off without either of them. Why don't you try to find some other girl friends, Gladys? There are probably several lonely girls in your school who would be glad to make

your acquaintance, and in whom you might find a great deal to admire—girls, moreover, whom you could trust. And a friend you can trust is the only kind worth having.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I'm inclosing the photo of myself and boy friend, and I would like to ask you a few questions about him and what is best to do in my case. His name is Willie and he is a sailor. He is a nice boy in his ways, but he is away from his parents and he has some bad habits. He is very fond of smoking and likes a drink now and again, and he spends a lot of time playing pool. I have another boy friend, who is very nice and has no bad habits, and he is trying to go with me. But the trouble is I don't like him very well and I do love Willie. The other one is a stout, fair boy and drives a bus from here to the city. Please tell me which of the two it would be wiser to marry.

TILLIE.

Child, where were you brought up that you think smoking and playing pool are bad habits? A man has to do something with his leisure time, has to have a little recreation, and I would rejoice if I were you that it takes such innocent forms as these. Even the drinking is not so bad since he apparently does not indulge to excess. You should marry the one you love, of course, but I don't want you to do it if you are going to nag him and try to make him over. I'm afraid you don't really love him enough, or you could not even consider marrying any one else, particularly a person you "don't like very well."

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have been married almost five years, have one little girl two years old and am expecting to be a mother again in February. I was eighteen when I married and I had always had a hard time. My father died when I was fourteen, leaving two little brothers for my widowed mother and myself to take care of, and we had an awful hard time of it. She decided to marry again and I didn't like my stepfather, so I married this man. I thought I loved him. We have never got along well. He is good in one way—he makes good wages and gives me half of it every week to run the house, and he pays the rent out of his share and buys coal. But he is very abusive, worse when he is drunk than other times, and drunk every Saturday night.

Our home was in Nashville, Tennessee, at first, then he came here to work and later I came, too, and he carried me to a hotel to board awhile and there I met a man that I learned to love. He was so good and kind to me, and sorry for me. Sometimes he would take my husband into his own room when he was drunk, and keep him locked in there until he got him sobered up. Finally we had to confess we cared for each other, and then he went away and I've never seen him again. But my life is a wreck. I do not love my husband and can hardly stand it to stay on with him, and I always think how different things would be if I had married that other. Do you think he was the one for me, and that I will ever see him again and have him for my own?

MISMATED.

I do not pretend to be able to foretell the future, but I think your case is one for the courts to settle. There is a Court of Domestic Relations in your city, to which you can go for the best and most practical advice and help. If your husband cannot be taught to control himself, it would be better for you to get some sort of legal agreement drawn up whereby he is made to provide for the babies and yourself as long as you are unable to work. It is not wise, nor sensible, nor even safe to go on living with such a man and bearing him children.

As for the other man, he is probably just an ideal to you which you built up for yourself when one love failed. He befriended you when you were in trouble, so you imagine he has all the virtues which your husband lacks. You should not let the thought of him, however, enter into any decision you may make. Try to conduct yourself in exactly the same way as you would if you did not know of his existence. I think you will not feel so miserable and so hopeless when you are well again.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a young man twenty-two years old. I never knew my father and mother nor any

of my relatives. I am all alone in this world. I have been in civilization only six years. I came from the African jungle. Civilization sure is dull to a fellow that hasn't any home or friends, so about two years ago I started out hunting for a mate. I found her in a little town in California. It was love at first sight on my part, and on hers, too, or I thought she loved me. So I started to work awful hard to earn enough money to buy a bungalow and to have some put by in the bank. We talked it out together and it was understood that after I had bought the bungalow and had five hundred dollars in the bank we would get married.

At the end of six months I had four hundred in the bank and had already picked out the bungalow and I got her to come and see if she liked it. She was delighted with it. The owner was away and wouldn't be back till about a week later. But during that week the girl went and married another man. I had been going with her about a year before this happened. He beats her and he is about twelve years older than she is. It is eight months since she married. I have been eating my heart out ever since. I have been on the point of taking my own life—it seemed sometimes as if anything would be better than suffering so. But I know it would be a sin, and I pray to be kept from it.

Mrs. Morton, could I have another girl that would love me true or are all girls like this one? I am afraid of looking for another girl if she does like that. Do you believe I could love another one? Please tell me what you think.

LARRY.

No, Larry, all girls are not like that. There are many, many in the world who would be true to you and would appreciate what you can give a woman, I do not mean material things, but spiritual. The only thing you can do now is grit your teeth and make up your mind you are going to live through this and come out of it unsoured. Make as many friends among men as you can; meet other girls and women, and don't expect to fall in love at first sight next time, but to get gradually acquainted with several until you find one who is truly congenial and trustworthy. Yes, you will be able to care again, of course. The very fact that your heart has been left empty now will make it readier for another tenant—and you will love another all the better for having had one who was not worthy with whom to contrast her. Sooner than you would believe possible, the wound will heal.

By the way, do you know Booth Tarkington's "The Conquest of Canaan"? I think you'd enjoy it, and that one chapter especially would help you—the one called "When Half Gods Go."

We have had so many unhappy stories to read this week that it is a pleasure to close with two letters that sound merry and gay.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a constant reader of ALL-STORY and am simply wild about it. I have not yet written to you, but Cheerful's letter woke me up. When I was nineteen years old I met a man of thirty at a party. He was at my side constantly. Then he came to my home. He said he loved me, told me he had a dandy fine home and lots of money. He asked me to marry him and I said "Yes." God knows I did not know what I was doing. I was too young, did not know what love was.

Robert then went to my parents—told them that I had consented to be his wife. My parents were shocked. My dad then told me that he did not like nor trust this man, but I was stubborn and still wanted to marry him. When nothing helped to change my mind I was told to choose between my parents and my "lover." I chose my parents, thank God for that. I am now twenty-four and, oh, you young girls, now I have my true love. My parents like and approve of this young man. We will be married soon. Girls, wait until you are older and you will understand true love better.

M. R. E.

DEAR GOSSIPED ABOUT:

I am your age and I have not the privilges you have. I cannot go out half as much as you can. I sew, cook and do things for the family. I like to go dancing and can't. I have plenty of friends and plenty of enemies. When I sit on the front porch and talk to some of the fellows, people talk about me terribly. If you want to be happy do not think a thing about the women who gossip about you. Have as much fun as you can in spite of them; otherwise you will be sorry. I don't mind the people, and I can't do as much as you, still I'm happy. Communicate with me through Mrs. Morton.

A SECRET FRIEND.

You signed your first name but not your last. Won't you let me have it, in case any one writes to you?

ALL-STORY'S HALL OF FAME

Mary Frances Doner

MARY FRANCES DONER, the author of "Everything But Love," now running in ALL-STORY, and many other delightful love stories, is just the kind of girl you would expect Mary Frances to be — perfectly adorable. Her face is beautiful and kind. Blond hair; eyes shining with sympathy; pretty lips which show an irrepressible sense of humor. Tall, gracious, beautifully dressed, perfectly poised. A rare combination of almost childlike simplicity with a brilliant flashing intellect and an understanding soul.

Mary Frances Doner, the girl with an outflowing personality, walks right into your heart by just being natural.

Mary Frances is "incurably romantic," and she admits it.

"Life fascinates me," she says. "Life—and people. I have known many kinds. Every one is interested in love: the elevator boy in your apartment hotel, the little manicurist who does your nails, the cool-eyed person from the *Social Register* who bids you to an exclusive tea. They're all afraid to admit how much the subject of love really does appeal to them, because it's supposed to be smarter to be cynical." She gave a low, musical laugh. "I guess I'm incurably romantic. I'm glad there will always be love and romance and happy endings, aren't you?"

The answer must be "Yes," because so many ALL-STORY readers have written in to say they prefer happy endings, both in fiction and in actual life.

Nothing pleases Mary Frances Doner more than to receive letters from girls who have read her stories and have found them helpful — girls to whom she has given a new vision of love and life—or girls who feel the need of her experience and broad outlook in solving personal problems. All such girls are invited to write to the author of "Everything But Love," in care of ALL-STORY magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City.

Miss Doner was born in Port Huron, Michigan; was trained for journalism—

at Columbia University, in New York City, and is now a Bostonian.

She is musically gifted and if she had not concentrated on short-story writing, she undoubtedly would have attained fame on the concert stage. Even now she is widely known as the musical critic of the *Boston Traveler.*

Her charming little house standing on the south shore of Massachusetts near where it edges into Cape Cod, is a perfect background for Mary Frances Doner's personality. The wide windows of the big living room look toward the sea. That room is gay with chintz of a sophisticated pattern, the firelight warms rows of books, and there is a chow dog named Ming Toy.

Outside, riding at anchor, is a fast motor boat belonging to this remarkable author; while in the garage is an even faster slim, rakish roadster which carries Mary Frances near and far in search of adventure and inspiration for her tales.

Next issue's niche in the ALL-STORY Hall of Fame will be given over to Doris Knight Jessee, whose latest and best story of San Francisco's Chinatown will appear in that issue.

Please Write to Us!

Every day when the mail-man comes around, we look eagerly for personal correspondence from our readers. The happiest moments of our busy day are those in which we receive letters from friends we have never seen—girls who write what they really think of ALL-STORY magazine.

If you're too busy to write a letter, just fill out this coupon and mail it. *Thank you!*

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Spotlight and Lovelight.....

Love Stronger Than Death.....

Just a Little Clown.....

Everything But Love.....

Sleuthing for Cupid.....

Wedded Strangers .....

Belief .....

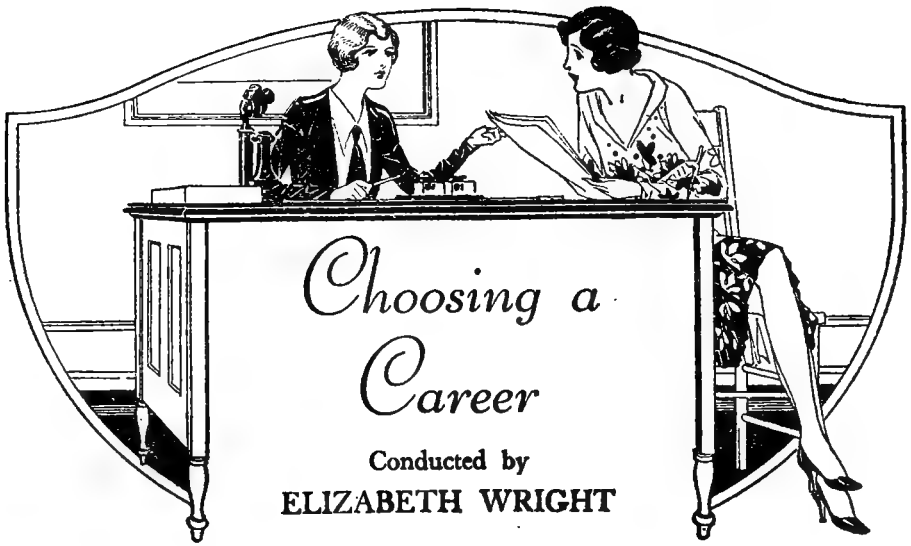
A One-Man Girl.....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)



Choosing a Career

Conducted by
ELIZABETH WRIGHT

HAVE you found your ideal job? Are you satisfied with your present salary? If not, let Miss Wright advise you.

In these pages many new and attractive professions for girls are discussed. If one of these appeals to you, and you wish to learn more about it, address your letter to Elizabeth Wright, care "Choosing a Career" Department, All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York. A stamped, addressed envelope will bring you an answer by mail.

I AM going to tell you this week about a young girl who is working her way upward on a ladder which is usually considered a very difficult one to climb. She is training to become a purchasing agent, or, as they express it in the big department store where she is employed, a "buyer."

She had always admired fine linens. She loved nice table napkins and pretty pocket handkerchiefs. She felt that she could do her best work handling the fabrics which she liked so well.

This girl traveled from one store to another seeking a position. Finally she found a vacancy at a bargain counter. It was located in the aisle of the store and her job was to sell handkerchiefs for eighteen cents each. For this she was to receive seventeen dollars a week.

It was very monotonous, standing there in the aisle, selling at a certain price, with no chance to turn to anything else. But the girl determined to stick to it. She was told that the job would last over the holidays only.

The third day she noticed that the top handkerchiefs on the counter were wrinkled. When the head of the department came around, this girl asked if she might go down in the basement and iron the handkerchiefs. She said she would do it during her noon hour or early in the morning before the store opened. "Why, yes," the head replied. "That's the first time any one ever thought of such a thing."

When the holidays were over this girl was transferred to the regular stock. She then had her first real chance to learn.

She noticed the weave of the linen, the texture of the cotton; soon she was

able to determine the price at a glance. Next she learned to compute, to figure costs. If a handkerchief sold retail for twenty cents, how much would a dozen handkerchiefs amount to? She had never been very quick at figures, and it was very difficult for her to compute quickly and accurately.

The buyer, seeing that the girl was really anxious to learn, was willing to help. Occasionally she allowed her to pass judgment upon new stock—to decide where and how it should be displayed. No buyer likes to have material left on hand; quick sales must follow each fresh purchase of goods.

The girl's chance came. She had been at the handkerchief counter only eight months when the buyer came to her. "I am going abroad to purchase linens," she said. "I want you to take my place temporarily." After an interview with the manager the girl was told that she might try.

Of course, a very careful supervision was placed upon her work. She had to submit everything to some one over her. But in each case her judgment was found to be so excellent that, in time, she is to be allowed to work independently. She wants to be the head linen buyer for that particular department store.

I talked with her a few evenings ago, and here are some of the rules she gave me. She says by following these any young girl, in whatever line she may be, can better her position. I give them practically as she gave them to me.

Do not try to sell anything which you do not thoroughly understand. If you are selling thread, learn where it is made and how.

Don't mind being laughed at when you ask questions. In time the buyer will come to understand that you are only trying to master the business and she—or he—will help you. The more you know the better you can sell. You can meet argument with argument.

This Week's Hint For Earning More Money

There is money in teaching English to foreigners. In every neighborhood, large or small, there are people—tradesmen, clerks—men and women, young and old, who find their limited knowledge of English a handicap. The public schools have evening classes for such people, but the hours are not always convenient.

By opening her parlor at any hour of the day for personal instruction a girl can earn steady money. The price of tuition varies from fifty cents an hour, in classes of ten or more, to a dollar for private lessons. No text books are used. The pupil is taught every-day English.

The opening lessons cover the names of the streets in the city, or of the roads in a rural community; the directions, north, south, east and west; the days of the week and months of the year, pronounced correctly.

Following these instructions come lessons in making change, always difficult for a foreigner.

The woman who teaches English to foreigners need not know one word of any language but her own. From the time the pupil enters the door and says, "Good evening!" to the minute when he leaves there is nothing spoken but English.

To get such pupils one can leave a card in the post office, in the railroad station, or at the desks of the hotels. In the city the drug store will distribute such cards, usually, as the customers enter and find themselves unable to make their wants known in English. It is a fine opportunity to make a little extra money.

You can show the customer—if you are selling gloves—that there are no thin spots in the kid, that the seams are carefully stitched, that the gloves are accurately cut. Haven't you had the experience of buying a pair of gloves with one small, tight finger—or with an open place where the machine did poor work? A good saleswoman will note such defects and place such goods aside to be laid on the "bargain" counter.

Suppose *you* had been asked to fill the regular buyer's place temporarily. You are to select handkerchiefs, say, for boys. You look over the many varieties offered you and make your selection. Now, upon the rapidity with which your stock goes, your future depends. This may seem like an extreme statement, but the big department stores watch their buyers closely.

If your stock goes rapidly, you may be asked to select the higher-priced stock, handkerchiefs of chiffon, of linen with real lace edges, *et cetera.* And these must sell, too, or your position will not be permanent.

Learn to compute purchases rapidly. An article which is bought at wholesale for fourteen cents must retail for considerably more than fourteen cents. The buyer must always be conscious of this fact. And she must know what her purchases amount to. At fourteen cents each, how much will one hundred dozen cost? How much, at twenty cents each, will they retail for? In other words, how much profit will there be on the entire transaction?

The salesgirl who has her vision set upon the art of buying is always noticing the market. If twenty women ask for amethyst beads during the course of one day she will say to the buyer: "There's a call for amethysts." The buyer thanks her and gets busy to supply the demand.

Every struggling young saleswoman has had a feeling of deep despair at the close of some particularly trying day. She has done good work and no notice is taken of it. She is tired and out-of-sorts. She is the best girl in her department, yet no more notice is taken of her than if she were merely a shirker.

When this occurs let the girl take stock of herself. Let her say: "Have I honestly studied the merchandise I am selling? Do I know enough about it to be worthy of promotion? Have I applied myself to learning the fundamentals of buying and selling, supply and demand, so that if a chance came I could fill the position of buyer?"

If the mental answer to these questions is "Yes!" then the girl can wait in patience. Her reward will surely come.

The original of any illustration in this or previous issues of ALL-STORY can be yours. Just tell us which illustration is your favorite and enclose ten coupons clipped from this magazine (see page 634) and we will send to your address the original artist's drawing.

In Confidence

Practical First Aid to Everyday Living

Conducted by

DOROTHEA DALE

ANY question about the little problems that confront you daily in your business or social life Mrs. Dale will be glad to answer. No question is too small. Write her about anything that is perplexing you—how to word a letter, how to travel, what present to give, what to say and when, table etiquette, et cetera.

If an emergency arises and you need immediate advice your letter will be answered by return mail, if you will inclose a return envelope stamped and addressed.

All letters will be held in strict confidence.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

Recently a friend of mine—at least, I thought she was a friend—had a dinner party, to which she did not invite my husband and myself until the very last minute, after some other couple had failed her. Don't you think we were right to refuse to go? Also, will you please tell me the proper mode of answering a dinner invitation and how long one should stay after dinner is over?

The more I think of it, the more insulting what she did seems. Don't you agree, Mrs. Dale?

M. PIERCE.

Why, no, I'm not sure I do. Life is too short to take offense on every possible occasion. Your friend may have had many reasons for what she did. Most people are limited as to space and facilities nowadays, and she may have had to ask the others first because of prior social debts. I think it would be better to accept such an invitation graciously, glad to do a friend the service of filling up her list, and try to make yourselves so agreeable that you would be the first invited next time.

The answer to an invitation is always written, and you choose the form of wording similar to that contained in the invitation itself. For instance, if the invitation was formal your answer should read like this:

MR. AND MRS. JOHN PIERCE
ACCEPT WITH PLEASURE
THE KIND INVITATION OF
MR. AND MRS. LEE SMITH
TO DINNER
ON FRIDAY, JANUARY TENTH
AT EIGHT O'CLOCK

If the invitation was informal and friendly, you answer in the same manner, using the first person instead of the third. It is always more polite to give the reason for a refusal if you are unable to accept.

You should not leave a house where

you have been dining before at least half an hour after dinner is over.

DEAR MRS. DALE:
I am, oh, so happy to find some one to help me out. I am a girl sixteen years of age and I am very skinny. I have tried eating the best of foods, but to no avail. It means more than anything else in the world to me because I want to take up stage dancing and I am so ashamed when I put on my scanty costumes because my arms and legs are so thin. What can I do? I envy the nice plump girls I go around with. If you would suggest anything that would make me plump quick I would be so thankful.

SKINNY,
Pennsylvania.

I fear there is nothing that will make you plump "quick," but I can let you have a diet list if you will send me your name and address. It is too long to print in my limited space. Your slenderness may be due to a variety of causes about which I am not competent to judge. Have you grown very rapidly in the last few years? Are you of a nervous temperament? Do you sleep well? One needs to know all those things in order to advise you to advantage and, besides that, you may have some glandular trouble which keeps you from assimilating your food properly and about which only a physician who knows you personally could help you. So many girls are trying to get thin these days, and ruining their health in doing it, that it is quite a novelty to find one who wants to get plump.

DEAR MRS. DALE:
I have been secretly married for almost a year and now wish to announce the fact to my friends. My mother is off of us and refuses to have the announcements engraved in her name. What would be the proper form to use in this case? JUST DORA.

It would be better taste, in view of the circumstances, for you not to make any formal announcement at all. If you tell your more intimate friends by telephone, word of mouth or letter, as is convenient, the news will quickly spread. You dispensed with formalities by marrying secretly, so it is better to be consistent and make as little "fuss" as possible now. Should an enterprising reporter call upon you, wanting to know all particulars, ask him to insert a short notice of your marriage, giving the date a year ago without comment.

DEAR MRS. DALE:
Although not a particularly well-educated person, I have recently taken up fiction writing and have succeeded in selling several stories to the lesser magazines. I wish to inquire about the proper heading to use on the first page of my manuscripts. The inclosed stamped envelope (for use if the story is rejected) I address to my own name instead of my husband's, because it seems less confusing. Does this give the impression that I am a widow or divorcée? Also, when typing a business letter should I write my signature in longhand or may I typewrite it? Was it correct to typewrite a letter of this kind or should I have written it out?

Thanking you,
MAY SHELLEY.

It is perfectly correct to write on the typewriter. But your signature should always be written by hand, although if you wish you may type it, too, with the "Mrs." in parentheses under the written signature.

A good form to use for the top sheet of manuscripts is as follows:

In the upper right-hand corner:

About 5,000 words
First American serial
rights offered

In the center of the page:

SUMMERTIME
by
May Shelley

In the upper left-hand corner your name and address.

In the business and professional world a woman may use her own name if she chooses. In your case, "Mrs. May Shelley" is perfectly correct on the envelope. It is only in social contacts that this is not good usage.

Win $3,500.00

Prizes from $1800.00 to $4235.00 each have been won through our unique advertising plan. In our last, an old man of 69, out of work, won over $5000.00. A boy, only 15, won $900.00. In next 3 or 4 months thousands of dollars will be awarded to fortunate persons who solve our puzzles and win our prizes.

FIND THE TWIN FLYERS

Watch out! These twelve pictures of a famous woman flyer all look alike—BUT—two, and only two, are exactly alike. Find these twin flyers! Some pictures are different in the collar, helmet, goggles, or tie. Remember, only two of the twelve are exactly alike. Find them, and send the numbers of the twin flyers on a post card or letter today. If correct, your answer will qualify you for this opportunity.

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Over 25 prizes, and duplicate prizes in case of ties. It's up to the winner whether he or she chooses $2875.00 in cash or a new Waco airplane, a big automobile, or a new home. A gorgeous prize list! ANYONE WHO ANSWERS THIS PUZZLE CORRECTLY MAY RECEIVE PRIZES OR CASH.

$625.00 ADDITIONAL FOR PROMPTNESS

Be prompt! It pays. Find the real twin flyers, and I will send Certificate which will be good for $625.00 if you are prompt and win first prize. Imagine, a first prize of $3500.00! NO MORE PUZZLES TO SOLVE. Any man, woman, boy, or girl in the U. S. A.—anyone at all, except residents of Chicago, Illinois, and former major prize winners. 25 of the people who take up this offer are going to win these wonderful prizes. Be one of them. Send the numbers of the twin flyers. Send no money, but be prompt.

J. D. SNYDER, Dept. 97, 54 W. Illinois St., Chicago, Ill.

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